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What Does Moral Phenomenology tell us about Moral Objectivity?

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Roughly speaking, moral phenomenology concerns the what-it-is-likeness of moral experiences—what it is like, for example, to experience oneself as being morally obligated to perform an action.¹ Some philosophers argue that attention to one’s moral phenomenology reveals that moral experiences have ‘objective purport’, in the sense that such experiences purport to be about some objective moral reality. Yet, in general, philosophers have not paid much attention to the rich details of moral phenomenology—the details of the what-it-is-likeness of moral experience.² Rather, when philosophers appeal to moral phenomenology (as they often do), one typically finds mention of such features as prescriptivity, sense of authority, and the like; but not much in the way of concentrated attention on matters of phenomenological detail. Perhaps moral philosophers think they don’t need to bother with such detail, which (so one might think) is better left to more qualified experts including psychologists, poets, and playwrights. But if one is serious about having one’s moral theory (whether in normative ethics or metaethics) fit with, or otherwise accommodate, the facts of moral phenomenology, then getting the phenomenological facts straight is crucially important. More specifically, if one wants to make a case for some form of moral objectivity on the basis of appeal to moral phenomenology, one must take a careful look at the phenomenology in question.

A fully adequate treatment of moral phenomenology and its bearing on questions of moral objectivity would require examining a vast range of types of moral experience, including, for example, experiences that have to do with, or which include, judgments of moral obligation and judgments of moral value, as well as experiences that involve the moral emotions—guilt, shame, indignation, and the like. In this paper, we restrict ourselves to questions about the phenomenology of experiences of what we call (following Maurice Mandelbaum) ‘direct’ moral obligation—experiences in which one is presently confronted with a situation or is facing a set of circumstances in which one feels morally obligated to act (or refrain from acting) in a certain way. About such experiences, we ask two questions. First, what are the introspectively accessible elements of such experiences?³ Second, how do these elements bear on the question of whether and in what way moral experiences purport to be about some objective matter; in particular, do such experiences ‘carry’ objective purport? As we shall explain below, we are here interested in what we will call *ontological* objective purport—the idea that moral experiences purport to be about some in-the-world moral *properties*. Given our specific focus, then, there are three competing answers to consider with regard to the second question:

Affirmative: It is an introspectively accessible fact that direct moral experiences do carry ontological objective purport.

Negative: It is an introspectively accessible fact that direct moral experiences do not carry such purport.

Neutrality: It is not introspectively accessible whether or not direct moral experiences carry ontological objective purport.

The third answer, Neutrality, presupposes that certain questions about the intentional content of direct moral experience do not have introspectively accessible answers, despite the fact that the experiences themselves are introspectively accessible.

A point of clarification is in order, concerning Neutrality. This answer does not claim that there is no fact of the matter *at all* about whether or not direct moral experiences carry ontological import; rather, it only claims that there is no *introspectively accessible* answer to the question about such import. Thus, even if Neutrality is right, there might well be a determinate answer to the second above-mentioned question; but this answer, whatever it is, would not be obtainable just by attending introspectively to one's own phenomenology.

What we will call the *argument from phenomenological introspection* has as its conclusion the Affirmative thesis and thus purports to provide a pro tanto reason to favor an ontologically objectivist metaethic. Moreover, this argument purports to get that pro tanto reason directly from the introspectively accessible aspects of moral phenomenology. We ourselves find the issue about moral experience and objective purport somewhat murky, and so much of our work in this paper will be devoted to clarifying the various issues at play in connection with the argument from phenomenological introspection. However, late in the paper, we shall offer a brief defense of the Neutrality thesis.⁴

Here is our plan. We begin (§I) by explaining two conceptions of moral objectivity that are prevalent in contemporary metaethical discussion, one 'ontological' and the other 'rationalist'. Because talk of 'phenomenology' requires clarification, we devote some attention in §II to explaining how we propose to use the term. We will then be in a position to characterize (§III) more precisely the kind of phenomenological argument we wish to examine—the argument from phenomenological introspection. In §IV, we provide a taxonomy of types of moral experience so that we can zero in on the phenomenology of the type we wish to consider—direct moral experiences of obligation, and in §V we provide two examples of such moral experience. Next (§VI) we turn to the work of Mandelbaum whose subtle phenomenological characterization of direct moral experiences of obligation we think is correct and provides a basis for exploring the above-

mentioned hypotheses regarding ontological objectivity. Having done all of this, in the remaining sections (VII-IX) we proceed to consider the various elements of such experiences in order to evaluate the argument from phenomenological introspection. Our purpose here is to explore how a metaethic that is not ontologically objectivist might provide a basis for challenging the argument. In previous writings we have defended what we call *cognitivist expressivism*, a view according to which (roughly) moral judgments are genuine *cognitive* belief states, yet such moral beliefs do not purport to describe some sort of moral reality, and rather they *express* a certain sort of commitment directed toward a non-moral state of affairs. We employ our cognitivist expressivism as a basis for exploring a non-ontological objectivist line of defense against the argument from phenomenological introspection.⁵ As we shall explain, there is more that would need to be done beyond what we undertake in this paper in order to mount a full and convincing response.⁶

I. Two conceptions of strong moral objectivity

In metaethical discussion there are two main conceptions of objectivity: one ontological, the other rationalist. Both, in their own way, represent what we shall call ‘strong’ conceptions—conceptions that are respectively featured in versions of moral realism and Kantian rationalism. Let us take these in order.

Ontological conception: This conception of moral objectivity is an instance of the sort of objectivity often associated with ordinary physical-object thought and discourse, according to which (roughly) there is an ‘objectively existing’ world of objects and instantiated properties (including relations) possessed by (or obtaining among) those objects. Often, this conception of ‘objective existence’ is expressed in terms of ‘mind-independence’.⁷ But thinking of ontological objectivity in terms of mind-independence is arguably too strong for our present purposes, because on some views, secondary qualities are response-dependent, and hence are not mind-independent, but nevertheless such properties are objective.

Indeed, in metaethics, the thesis that moral properties (instantiations of them) are on an ontological par with response-dependent color properties—that a property like intrinsic value is as much ‘out there to be experienced’ as are instantiations of color properties, even if both are response-dependent—would seemingly secure enough ontological objectivity for morality to combat various forms of metaethical non-cognitivism, relativism, and subjectivism. So, following contemporary metaethical fashion, we can distinguish two forms or grades of ontological moral objectivism (‘realism’, if you like). According to *robust* versions, moral properties are a kind of, or analogous to, prototypical primary qualities in that their nature and existence (i.e., whether or not they are instantiated in the world) are not mind- (including human response-) dependent. But according to more *modest* versions, moral properties are a kind of, or at least have the same sort of ontological status as do, secondary qualities, color properties in particular. Their being response-dependent in a way analogous to color properties (when colors are construed as ‘secondary qualities’) is still sufficient to say of them that when instantiated they are ‘there to be experienced’.⁸

It bears emphasis too that the ontological conception of objectivity not only claims that moral judgments have descriptive content—i.e., purport to represent facts consisting of the instantiation of moral properties that are ‘there to be experienced’—but also claims that such facts are not about certain idiosyncratic psychological states of the agent making the moral judgment (states such as preferences or attitudes of approval/disapproval). Ontological objectivism is a form of metaethical descriptivism, certainly. But it is to be distinguished from the kind of descriptivism that earlier in the century was called ‘subjective naturalism’, which construed moral facts as facts about the psychology of the morally-judging agent.

Rationalist conception: Speaking very generally and somewhat loosely, a realm of thought and discourse is objective, according to this conception, if there is a method of thinking or reasoning whose use would yield (under proper conditions of application) convergence in belief about the

subject matter in question. The primary examples here are mathematics and logic.⁹ In metaethics, this view is clearly exemplified by Firth's ideal observer theory and Michael Smith's metaethical rationalism.¹⁰ According to these views, there is a non-moral conception of rational choice involving norms of practical reasoning whose proper application is sufficient to yield a set of richly determinate moral norms or principles. This form of metaethical objectivity, then, is meant to capture the idea, famously expressed by Kant, that 'a law, if it is to hold morally, that is as a ground of obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command "thou shalt not lie" does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it...'¹¹ This idea of requirements holding necessarily for all rational beings is Kant's idea of those requirements being *categorical*.

Even though these two conceptions of moral objectivity differ in important ways, they do share a unifying theme: they both try to capture a strong conception of objectivity according to which some realm of thought and discourse is objective only when there is some 'reality'—some ontology or method—that 'backs up' or 'stands behind' such thought and discourse and serves to 'make true' certain claims in the discourse and 'make false' other claims.

Before moving on, we make three observations about the relationship between these two conceptions.

First, one might hold that the idea of moral objectivity involves a blend or combination of both kinds of objectivity. J. L. Mackie seemed to think so.¹² He held that moral thought and discourse are committed to the idea that moral requirements are categorical (in the sense just indicated) and to the idea that there are instantiated moral properties (including moral requiredness) that are strongly objective and thus on a metaphysical par with primary qualities.¹³ But a secondary quality-like account of moral realism is also (perhaps) likely to attempt a combination: moral properties are

‘there to be experienced’ (ontological claim) and their nature is best captured by a dispositional (response-dependent) account that is basically rationalist.¹⁴

Second, it is possible to hold that there are objective moral properties in the ontological sense and yet deny, or be neutral with respect to, the idea that morality is also objective in the rationalist sense. Suppose, for instance, that moral properties are like secondary qualities in that a proper understanding of them requires referring to how human beings in certain circumstances would respond—without supposing that such properties are there to be experienced by *all rational beings*. Perhaps one could wax Humean on this particular matter: we humans have a certain constitution—maybe a ‘moral sense’ (in a loose sense of the term)—through which we are able to perceive or respond to values that have an ontological status similar to that of colors. The idea would be to combine the claim that there are moral properties possessed by items of evaluation with a rejection of a strong rationalist commitment to claims about all rational beings.

Third, at least *prima facie* it is possible to embrace the idea that morality is objective in a distinctively rationalist way without supposing that there are moral properties possessed by items of evaluation in the way that an ontological moral realist might suppose.¹⁵ Suppose there are rational norms of obligatoriness that hold for all rational agents. If so, then one can say of some action that it is obligatory, but in saying this one doesn’t have to suppose that in addition to the natural features of the action it has some further property, obligatoriness, that is either identical to, constituted exhaustively by (but not type identical to), or otherwise something ‘over and above’ the natural properties on which this special property supervenes. One example is R. M. Hare’s metaethical view according to which moral judgments are ‘objective prescriptions’.¹⁶ Hare denied that his view involving objective prescriptions committed him to a moral ontology of the sort that would involve moral properties, though he defended the claim that certain features of moral language together with (non-moral) constraints on rational choice yield an essentially utilitarian moral theory.¹⁷ Indeed

contemporary Kantians tout rationalist objectivity as a way of avoiding metaphysical moral realism. Korsgaard writes: 'If ethically good action is simply rational action, we do not need to postulate special ethical properties in the world or faculties in the mind in order to provide ethics with a foundation'.¹⁸

In sum: (1) there are two main conceptions of strong metaethical objectivity: ontological and rationalist; (2) the ontological conception covers both robust and modest conceptions of what can count as an objective property; (3) it is at least *prima facie* possible for a metaethical view to combine either form of ontological objectivity with the rationalist conception of objectivity; however, (4) it is also possible (again *prima facie*) to embrace the rationalist conception without also embracing the ontological conception (in either of its versions), and the other way around.

So, in light of these conceptions of moral objectivity and their interconnections, one main question about moral phenomenology is whether it embodies or 'carries' the pretensions of either sort of objectivity. But before responding to this question, there is preliminary work to be done which will occupy us in the next three sections.

II. Phenomenology: subject matter and method

In recent philosophy of mind, the term 'phenomenology' is used sometimes to refer to a type of *subject matter*, comprising certain aspects of one's mental life that are available to introspection in a distinctive way. But the term is also used to refer to a *method* of first-person introspection that allegedly carries with it a special first-person warrant attaching to one's first-person judgments about one's own experiences.¹⁹ We think of phenomenology as involving both the subject matter and the method just mentioned. However, in order to make ourselves clear as we proceed, we will use the term 'phenomenology' mainly to refer to subject matter, and we will generally use the term 'introspection' for the associated method.

In this section we will make some clarificatory remarks about both the subject matter and the method. Part of our purpose is to situate moral phenomenology, as we understand it, within the context of various ongoing debates in contemporary philosophy of mind. As we will make clear, phenomenology generally and moral phenomenology in particular can be characterized in a way that is non-committal about competing positions in several of those debates. Having a characterization of moral phenomenology that is non-committal in the ways we will proceed to explain is important for our purposes; we want to work with a characterization of this area of inquiry that does not beg any questions about potential subject matter and methodology that might taint our investigation of the argument from phenomenological introspection.

Phenomenology and Phenomenal Consciousness

Qua subject matter, phenomenology is closely related to what is often called ‘phenomenal consciousness’ in recent philosophy of mind. Are they one and the same? That depends. Under some positions concerning the nature of phenomenal consciousness, they are indeed the same; but under others, phenomenally conscious states are only a proper part of the full scope of phenomenology. Let us explain.

One disputed issue concerns the scope of phenomenal consciousness. On some views, its scope is confined to the realm of sensory experience, or perhaps to sensory experience plus sensory imagery. Phenomenal consciousness is confined to the ‘what-it’s-likeness’ of sensations—e.g., what it’s like to see a bright red tomato, what it’s like to smell rotten eggs, what it’s like to experience a searing pain in the left toe, etc.²⁰ Such views maintain that the range of mental states that are conscious *as opposed to unconscious* is much wider than the range of mental states that are *phenomenally* conscious. Although one’s occurrent beliefs, for example, typically are conscious rather than unconscious, occurrent beliefs have no distinctive or proprietary phenomenal character; rather, the sense in which they are conscious involves their accessibility to the cognitive agent. Such states are

‘access conscious’ but not phenomenally conscious, to use Ned Block’s influential distinction. A mental state is access-conscious when that state is available to the agent for purposes of reasoning.²¹

On other views, however, the scope of phenomenal consciousness is much broader than just *sensory*. In the strongest form, these views maintain that all—or virtually all—mental states that are access conscious are also phenomenally conscious—and, indeed, that their first-person accessibility derives from their phenomenal character. (There is a distinctive phenomenal character, for instance, of *believing* that Hillary Clinton will be the next president, different from the phenomenal character of *hoping* that she will be the next president. Likewise, there is a distinctive phenomenal character of believing that she *will* be the next president, different from the phenomenal character of believing that she will *not* be.)²²

Another disputed issue concerns whether phenomenal consciousness possesses intentionality. On some views (in particular, some views that claim that all phenomenal character is sensory or sensory-imagistic), the answer is no: phenomenal character is inherently non-intentional, and mental intentionality is inherently non-phenomenal. On other views, however, all (or virtually all) phenomenal character is inherently intentional, i.e., inherently *represents* things as being certain ways.²³

Phenomenology, understood as comprising both method and subject matter, can be and should be construed in a way that leaves it uncommitted about these disputed issues. As method, phenomenology does assume that much of one’s conscious (as opposed to unconscious) mental life has a distinctive epistemic status from a first-person perspective: it is *directly accessible via introspection*. But this leaves open whether or not introspective accessibility always rests on first-person apprehension of phenomenal character. If phenomenal character is restricted to sensations and/or sensory imagery, then the range of introspection extends beyond the bounds of phenomenal consciousness—because certain mental states are introspectively accessible even though they lack any distinctive or proprietary phenomenal character. In this case, the subject matter of

phenomenology includes aspects of mentality other than what is phenomenally conscious (while also including phenomenally conscious aspects too, of course). On the other hand, if all or virtually of all mental states that are access-conscious do have distinctive phenomenal character, then it may well be that introspective access to these states is always a matter of apprehending their phenomenal character. In that case, the subject matter of phenomenology is just phenomenal consciousness itself.

“What It’s Like”

In what follows we plan to make free use of the locution, ‘what it’s like’. Its use is very natural in connection with introspective judgments about one’s own mental life, whether or not one takes those judgments to be grounded in an apprehension of phenomenal character. Consider, for instance the question: “How do you know whether you really believe that Hillary Clinton will win the Democratic election, or merely hope she will?” In response, one should say: “Look, there’s an introspectively accessible difference between just hoping something and actually believing it, a difference in *what such states are like*. And I know that in my case, the state is belief—because of *what the state is like*.” So we are going to make free use of what-it’s-like talk, in what follows.

Is this a broader use of such talk than the common use in philosophy of mind, whereby the idea of phenomenal character is often glossed as “those aspects of one’s mental life such that there is something it is like to undergo them”? Well, that depends on one’s position concerning the scope of phenomenal character—about which moral phenomenology per se is neutral. Thus, moral phenomenology per se is also neutral about whether its own use of what-it’s-like talk is broader than the use that applies such talk only to phenomenal character. (It all depends on the scope of phenomenal character, about which moral phenomenology is neutral.)²⁴

Phenomenology and the Content of Perceptual Experience

Another disputed issue in philosophy of mind concerns the intentional content of perceptual experience—in particular, what kinds of content are, or are not, aspects of perceptual experience itself. On some views, perceptual experience per se has only fairly limited and primitive content, even though perceptually-grounded beliefs often have much richer content. (Such views typically deny, for instance, that perceptual experience per se represents causal connections, even though *beliefs* with causal content often are directly grounded in perceptual experience.) On other views, the content of perceptual experience is very rich—rich enough, for instance, to include the experiential representation of causal connections.²⁵

Phenomenology, as method, is neutral about this dispute too. After all, perceptually grounded beliefs are themselves within the purview of phenomenology anyway, insofar as such beliefs are introspectively accessible (as they often are). Of particular relevance here, given our concerns in this paper, are spontaneous, perceptually grounded, *moral* judgments—as in Harman’s famous example of rounding the corner and finding oneself “just seeing” (as one says) that those hoodlums are doing something wrong in lighting the cat on fire just for fun.²⁶ The moral judgment is spontaneous, and moreover arises spontaneously from one’s perceptual experience—that’s what matters. Whether or not the wrongness-content is already there in perceptual experience itself, as opposed to being a “cognitive overlay” that only enters in the cognitive transition from perceptual experience to belief, is not important, for present purposes. And again, moral phenomenology per se is methodologically neutral about this.²⁷

Phenomenology and Introspective Accessibility

As we have characterized phenomenology, both as method and as subject matter, the issue is left open whether or not all aspects of mentality that fall within the subject matter of phenomenology are reliably introspectable. One might think this couldn’t be so, since the subject matter is supposed to be that which is available to introspection. However, one needs to distinguish

between what's *present in experience* or *experientially given*, and what aspects of the latter are reliably *ascertainable* introspectively. Here are two examples that illustrate this point. You may recall from a famous paper by Roderick Chisholm the case of glancing at a speckled hen.²⁸ Plausibly, a determinate number of speckles are given in the experience and thus present in experience. But one cannot reliably ascertain that number just via introspection, especially if the experience is fairly short-lived. Here is the second example. Consider the question of whether the content of agentive experience is compatible with state-causal determinism. Plausibly, the answer to that question is *fixed* just by the nature of the experience itself, as the experience is self-presented to the agent. Arguably, however, introspection alone won't allow one to reliably ascertain that answer.²⁹

The fact that certain features can be present in experience without being available to introspection is very important for our purposes in this paper, because it underscores certain potential limitations in the extent to which facts about experiential character can be ascertained just by means of introspectively attending to one's own phenomenology. Perhaps, for instance, (1) there is a definite fact of the matter about whether or not direct moral experiences carry ontological objective import, and yet (2) this fact if the matter (whatever it is) is not introspectively accessible. Then the argument for phenomenological inspection will be in trouble—even if those who propound that argument happen to be correct (though we ourselves doubt this) in their contention that direct moral experiences do carry ontological objective purport.

Moral Phenomenology Characterized

We have just been emphasizing how one might understand phenomenology in a manner that is non-committal with respect to a number of contested issues about its subject matter and methodology. To briefly review, the key points are these. The subject matter of phenomenology comprises occurrent mental states that have a what its likeness (broadly construed), whether or not all such states possess a phenomenal character. The methodology of phenomenology is

introspection, through which one has direct first-person access to one's own conscious mental states. Here the point to stress is that one should not assume that all of one's conscious mental states (or all conscious elements of them) are directly introspectively accessible.

With these caveats in mind, we propose the following as a characterization of *moral* phenomenology:

MP Moral phenomenology includes as *subject matter* all of those occurrent mental states with moral content that have a what it is likeness (broadly construed), whether or not all such states (or all aspects of such states) possess phenomenal character. The *method* characteristic of moral phenomenology involves the use of first person introspective access to conscious mental states with moral content, whether or not all such states (or all conscious elements of such states) are directly introspectively accessible.³⁰

Although our characterization of moral phenomenology is neutral about whether there is more to the subject matter than what is reliably introspectively ascertainable, not all the positions mentioned at the outset are thus uncommitted. The thesis called Neutrality, we take it, is committed on this issue (at least on one natural assumption, viz., that direct moral experience either determinately does, or else determinately does not, have ontologically objective purport). The Neutrality picture is this: on the one hand, there is a fact of the matter about whether or not direct moral experience carries ontologically objective purport, but on the other hand, this fact of the matter (whatever it is) is not ascertainable introspectively. We will return to this thesis below in sections VII, VIII, and X.³¹

III. The argument from phenomenological introspection

As we have said, a main task of this paper is to zero in on a kind of metaethical argument that appeals to an alleged fact about moral phenomenology that allegedly is introspectively accessible (viz., that moral phenomenology carries ontologically objective purport), as a basis for concluding

that the phenomenology of moral experiences provides a *pro tanto* reason to favor an objectivist metaethic. More precisely, we are interested in a species of phenomenological argument that has the following 5 features.

1. The sort of strong objectivity being argued for is ontological. However, it does not matter for our present purposes whether the argument is being made in favor of robust ontological moral objectivity or for a more modest, sensibility form of such objectivity.

2. The argument is supposed to be a distinctive form of metaethical argument—one that is different from arguments appealing to considerations that concern theoretical semantic issues, or to metaphysical and epistemological issues concerning moral thought and discourse.³²

3. Part of what makes the argument distinctive is that it relies crucially on an appeal to introspection: the argument appeals to putative features of one's own moral experience that one allegedly can detect by turning one's attention inward and focusing on the relevant kind of experience. Those who appeal to matters of moral phenomenology as a basis for defending ontological moral objectivism seem to think that whether or not the phenomenology carries ontological objectivist purport is something that is introspectively accessible. This entails the denial of the Neutrality thesis (N). But suppose that thesis (N) is correct. Presumably, then, mere appeal to introspective awareness will not be sufficient in arguing the *pro tanto* case³³ for ontological moral objectivism; rather, the objectivist will need to bring to bear other, non-phenomenological considerations (e.g., theoretical questions about moral semantics and about moral metaphysics) to make her case. Once this happens, however, the supposed distinctiveness of the argument from phenomenological introspection is lost.

4. Finally, the argument presupposes that people by and large do share a common moral phenomenology whose elements provide a suitably pre-theoretical basis to which the metaethicist can appeal in making a case for some form of objectivist metaethic. The idea here is that if the

argument in question is to have any evidential weight with respect the pro tanto plausibility of competing metaethical views, there must be some metaethical theory-independent facts about the phenomenology to which an appeal can be made and which clearly is fully compatible with some but not all going metaethical theories. Furthermore, for purposes of the phenomenological argument for ontological moral objectivism, there must be some pre-theoretical elements of moral experience that specifically favor an ontologically objectivist metaethical view, rather than, for instance, simply ruling out, say, crude emotivist views.

Summing up, then, the phenomenological argument we wish to consider is properly understood as an argument from introspection that attempts to pick out commonly shared pre-theoretical elements of moral experiences whose ontological objectivist purport is introspectively accessible.

IV. A taxonomy of moral experience

Unfortunately, the term ‘moral phenomenology’, at least as used by philosophers, is accordion-like in its usage. Sometimes, it is used *very* broadly to refer to any and all of what are considered to be deeply embedded features of moral thought and discourse including: (a) its grammar and logic, (b) people’s ‘critical practices’ regarding such thought and discourse (including, for example, the assumption that genuine moral disagreements are possible), and (c) the what-it-is-likeness of various moral experiences, including, but not restricted to, concrete experiences of occurrently morally judging some action, person, institution, or other item of moral evaluation. Used *very* narrowly, the term is used to refer to what we might call ‘raw affective feeling states’ comprising only a proper subset of what-it-is-likeness elements in moral experience. As we explained above in section II, we construe the scope of phenomenology to range over sensory, cognitive, desiderative, as well as affective experiences. So we do plan to use the term neither very narrowly, nor very broadly, but as referring to occurrent mental phenomena that seem constitutive of a broad range of everyday moral experience.

But we need to be more explicit about the kind of moral experience we wish to consider. To do so, we offer a taxonomy of types of moral experience so that we may triangulate a proper part of moral phenomenology that will be the focus later in this paper. To anticipate: we are particularly interested in the what-it-is-likeness of [1] *judgment-involving* [2] *first-order* [3] *experiences of moral obligation that are* [4] *direct and* [5] *intuitive*. We now proceed to briefly explain these five characteristics, after which we provide a summary visual aid.

Judgment-involving moral experiences: Many moral experiences involve as a component coming to have or form a moral judgment. For instance, after thinking it over for awhile, one comes to think that the U.S. ought not to have invaded Iraq. Part of one's overall experience here is the coming to have or make a moral judgment. Some moral phenomenologists claim that an important variety of moral experience does not involve having or making moral judgments. According to Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus there are cases of what they call 'ethical comportment' in which a morally skilled individual spontaneously performs some morally appropriate action in some circumstance without making or having a moral judgment.³⁴ Spontaneously reaching out a helping hand to someone about to slip and fall is perhaps an example. We don't take a stand on whether such cases are properly described as not involving moral judgment (although frankly we doubt it, because we believe that such spontaneous actions are more plausibly construed as the unhesitant effects of moral judgments that are themselves spontaneous rather than deliberative). But in case such actions do meet that description, our focus is properly characterized as being on judgment-involving moral experiences.

First-order and second-order. Certainly experiences of guilt, shame, indignation, and moral anger are important in the study of moral phenomenology. But these moral emotions are typically second-order moral experiences, since they are directed toward actions and other items of moral evaluation that are judged to be morally wrong or bad. One judges for instance that Tracy has benefited from her moral wrong-doing, which arouses in one the moral emotion of indignation. What we are calling

first-order moral judgments, then, are those more basic judgments of obligation and value that may prompt some particular moral emotion of the sort just mentioned.³⁵

Judgments of obligation and judgments of value: It is common to distinguish judgments of moral obligation from judgments of moral value. One might suppose that the phenomenologies involving judgments of one type are much the same as the phenomenologies involving the other type. But Maurice Mandelbaum, in his overlooked 1955 treatise on moral phenomenology, made a further distinction that challenges this supposition.

Direct and removed judgments of obligation: According to Mandelbaum, there is an important phenomenological difference between what he called ‘direct’ and ‘removed’ moral experience. Direct moral experiences are those in which one is presently confronted with a set of circumstances which one experiences as ‘calling for’ one to either act or refrain from acting in a particular way on that occasion, and in response to which one comes to have or make a moral judgment about what one ought or ought not do. By contrast, removed moral experiences include those which involve the making or the having of an ought-judgment about one’s past self or about someone else, as well as all judgments about the moral goodness or badness of specific character traits and overall character of self and others. Mandelbaum claims that one phenomenological difference between such types of experience is the fact that a direct moral experience

evokes emotion [which], like fear or anger, is experienced as a state of the self and is directly related to action. [By contrast] the stirredupness and pressures which are present in direct moral judgments have no counterpart in removed moral judgments.³⁶

For purposes of this paper, we adopt Mandelbaum’s direct/removed distinction. Our focus will be experiences of the former type about which we will be saying more in later sections.

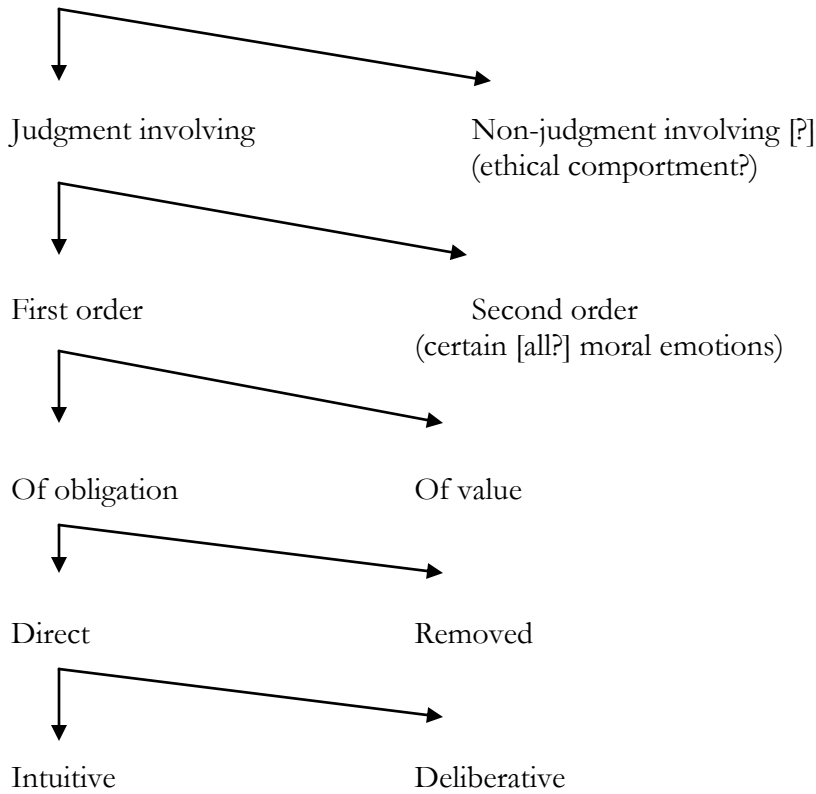
Intuitive and deliberative moral judgments: Intuitive judgments are psychologically spontaneous in that they occur ‘without a conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion’.³⁷ Earlier, we mentioned Harman’s example where you round a

corner and see a group of hoodlums pore gasoline on a cat and set it on fire. As Harman says, ‘you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that it is wrong’.³⁸ By contrast, deliberative moral judgments result from such activities as consciously searching, weighing evidence, and then inferring a moral conclusion.³⁹

Here, then, is a visual aid featuring a ‘set-aside’ sequence that summarizes the various distinctions we have been making. As one moves down levels, the arrows pointing to the right point to a category of experience that is being distinguished and set aside from the type of experience under the vertical arrow.

Fig. 1: Taxonomy

TYPES OF MORAL EXPERIENCE



Besides allowing us to specify the type of moral experience that will be the focus of our investigation, the above taxonomy is a reminder that one should not *assume* that moral experience of all types exhibits some core phenomenological elements that unify these experiences as being distinctively moral.⁴⁰ This is important for questions about moral objectivity, because it is possible that some types of moral experience include elements that support one conception of moral objectivity, while other moral experiences support a different conception, and perhaps still others support neither conception. Still, it bears emphasis that philosophers who want to argue that moral experience carries ontologically objective purport tend to focus on intuitive moral experiences, while those who are primarily interested in defending the rationalist conception tend to focus instead on the phenomenology of moral deliberation.

Furthermore, and most importantly for present concerns, there is the question of whether some type of moral experience—whether intuitive or deliberative—is neutral with regard to such metaphysical matters and, in particular, whether by introspection alone one can determine whether the experiences in question carry ontological objectivist purport.

As previously mentioned, our focus will be on the what-it-is-likeness of those moral experiences that combine all of the elements in the left hand column. Henceforth, we will refer to such experiences simply as *direct* experiences of moral obligation, even though we mean only to be focusing primarily on direct and *intuitive* moral experiences. And, as we have been saying, our main question about such experiences is whether it is introspectively accessible that such experiences carry ontological objective purport.

V. Two examples of direct moral experience

As we have just explained, ‘direct’ moral experience refers to those experiences in which one presently encounters what one takes to be a morally significant situation—a situation that seems to ‘call for’ one to act or refrain from acting and which involves as a constituent an all-in judgment of

obligation about what one ought or ought not do in the present circumstances. Here are two examples.

Sophie's conversation

Sophie and Audrey have enjoyed a close friendship spanning three decades. Despite living in different parts of the world for the past twelve years, their friendship has not eroded. Email has made staying in touch on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis easy given their family lives and heavy work schedules. Sophie has just received exciting news that she is to be promoted from her present position to a vice president of the corporation for which she has worked for nearly twenty-five years. This is the sort of news befitting a phone call to Audrey. She calls. But instead of being greeted with Audrey's typical hearty and cheerful 'Hello? Audrey speaking', she hears a weak and decidedly downbeat, 'hello'. Sophie hesitates a moment: 'Hello?, Audrey is that you? This is Soph.' ...Short silence... 'Are you there? Are you alright?' Audrey: 'Yes, it's me, Sophie, but I'm afraid I have some bad news....I've just been let go...my job, I mean.' Sophie: 'My God! I'm so sorry! This is terrible news!

This begins a long conversation between Sophie and Audrey during which Sophie is mostly silent allowing Audrey to express her disappointment, embarrassment, and anger over her job loss. Early on in this conversation it is patently clear to Sophie that now is obviously not the time to share her good news with Audrey—she should wait for a later, more appropriate occasion. Her judgment about waiting is psychologically immediate: she doesn't consciously rehearse or weigh various considerations; rather, once she hears the voice of Audrey and what Audrey has to say, her judgment to withhold the news is spontaneous.

Rashid's appointment

It's Friday, the last day of the semester before finals and Rashid arrives at the department headed for his office bright and early. In past weeks, he has been working furiously on a paper due

yesterday which he managed to send off in the 11th hour. As he walks through his building toward his office, Rashid is experiencing a sense of calm as he reflects with relief on what he's managed to accomplish during the semester: a paper just completed and sent off, a large introductory course with 200 students that for you was for him 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 Barkley, his new Lab puppy, and so on. Over the past two weeks, Rashid has had to ignore some things, including a flood of email which he plans to spend the morning sorting through. He thinks he really should not have ignored as so much email, but he finds dealing with email a huge distraction, so on occasion he has to take draconian measures and ignore the urgent in order to tackle the truly important.. Dealing with his inbox ought to take about three hours, he guesses, then it's home again to pack for a short, much needed vacation. Teaching assistants are giving the final examination on Monday, he'll be back to submit final grades the following Friday. With email out of the way, Rashid will be able to relax. Ah, sometimes life is good; as he unlocks his office door, he now feel positively cheery.

Ready to work, Rashid turns on your computer and as always his daily calendar pops up. He is about to minimize it when he notices an entry for today at 8:30 (in about half an hour)—and he remembers. Many weeks ago (so it seems) he made an appointment with a struggling student who had asked Rashid to help him go over comments he had received from one of his TAs on his most recent paper. Rashid allows students to re-write papers, and this one is due no later than Monday's final exam period. Rashid's cheery mood is replaced by a mild sinking feeling as he begins to realize how much time it will likely take to provide useful help to this student. For one thing, he will need to dig out his paper and re-read it, and he can predict that meeting with *this* student is going to take quite a while. Rashid could, of course, close his door, turn out the light, and just not answer the 8:30

knock. But given the present circumstances which includes his relationship with and promise to his student, Rashid doesn't need to figure out what he ought to do; it is (in light of his recognition of the circumstances) immediately clear to him. With a deep sigh, Rashid begins clearing the books from a chair so his student will have a place to sit. He then picks up the paper and begins to read, catching up on email will just have to wait.

.....

The experiences of both Sophie and Rashid are cases of direct moral experiences. One might think that there isn't much to say in addition to how we have already described Sophie's conversation and Rashid's appointment: in such cases (were one to occupy either of their roles) one senses what one ought or ought not to do, which is the content of some occurrent psychological state. So (the thought might continue) although there may be a lot to say about the psychology of an individual like Sophie who spontaneously judges that now is not the time to convey good news to her friend, what there is to say has to do with psychological matters that are not occurrent and so not part of her on the spot phenomenology. We deny this. We claim that the phenomenology in such cases typically includes quite a lot of rich phenomenological detail—detail that one finds in Mandelbaum's characterization of the phenomenology of such direct moral experiences.

VI. Mandelbaum's phenomenology of direct moral experiences

According to Mandelbaum, those sorts of direct moral experiences had by Sophie and Rashid involve two 'levels'⁴¹: (1) a 'felt demand' which is, as he says, 'phenomenologically grounded in' (2) an apprehension of a contemplated action being unfitting (relaying her good news in Sophie's case, not keeping his appointment in Rashid's case). Let us consider these levels in order.

[A] demand is experienced as a force. Like other forces it can only be characterized through including in its description a reference to its point of origin and to its direction. 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.⁴²

Three exegetical and interpretative comments are in order here.

First, in further explaining the ‘external’ source of moral demands, Mandelbaum contrasts them with non-moral demands such as those associated with hunger, desire for attention, and sexual arousal which we experience as being “within us”.⁴³ Second, according to Mandelbaum, this sort of desire/urge-independence grounds the sense of ‘objectivity’ one takes one’s direct moral experiences to have. In her conversation, Sophie is aware of various features of her present circumstances that she experiences as ‘calling for’ or demanding that she refrain from saying anything to Audrey about her job advancement. Similarly, Rashid’s reflection on his present circumstances (that includes considerations about his promise to a student, the student’s circumstances, and so forth) are experienced by him as placing a demand on his current behavior ‘emanating from’ these desire-independent facts of his present circumstance. Third, in this phenomenological description, one can distinguish three elements: (1) the raw affective element, which Mandelbaum describes as a felt ‘pressure’ or ‘tension’,⁴⁴ (2) the vector-like force aspect of the experience involving as we have seen a sense of its origin and direction, which, being directed against the one making the judgment, is ‘reflexive’,⁴⁵ and (3) the overall motivational pull that the contemplated action or omission (in the circumstances) seems to exert.

Turning now to the second level of phenomenological description, experiences of felt moral demand, according to Mandelbaum, are phenomenologically *grounded in* the relational characteristics of *fittingness* and *unfittingness*. Mandelbaum writes:

When I experience a demand to keep a promise this demand does not issue from me, but is leveled against me: it is not that I want to give X five dollars which motivated me, but the fact that I feel obligated to keep my promise. The promise itself appears as an objective fact which places a demand upon me whether I want to keep it or not.... In this type of case... it becomes clear that the element of moral demand presupposes an apprehension of fittingness:

the envisioned action places a demand upon us only because it is seen as connected with and fittingly related to the situation which we find ourselves confronting.⁴⁶

Since the notion of unfittingness, unlike fittingness, seems intuitively to involve, or be closely related to, the idea of a *demand*, we take it to be the more basic notion here.⁴⁷

Let us now put all of this together. Experiences of direct moral obligation (of the sort Mandelbaum is describing) have these three main features:

- They are *ought-judgment involving*: an agent having or undergoing such an experience judges of herself that in the present circumstances she ought or ought not perform some action;
- This ought-judgment is part of an overall moral experience in which one experiences a *felt demand* whose elements include (a) a feeling of pressure, (b) a sense of a vector force whose origin is ‘external’ and is directed at oneself, and (c) an associated motivational pull towards either performing an action or refraining from performing an action.
- This felt demand is experienced as based on an ‘*apprehension*’ of *unfittingness*; that is, of a contemplated action or omission being unfittingly related to present circumstances (as one takes them to be).

We submit that Mandelbaum’s phenomenological description does accurately describe most, if not all, of the important elements of people’s typical direct moral experiences (at least we can speak for ourselves). So, in examining this phenomenology for any objective pretensions it may involve, one can ask whether any of these elements carry ontological objective purport. Answering this question, we think, is delicate—which may explain why one finds disagreement among philosophers about how to properly answer the question. Our strategy in trying to answer it will involve two steps.

First, we describe a metaethical view that denies ontological moral objectivity, and that we have elsewhere argued is theoretically attractive for various reasons over and above matters of moral phenomenology; we call it *cognitivist expressivism*.⁴⁸ Second, we proceed to consider the three main

features of the phenomenology of direct moral experience, asking about each them, whether alone or in combination, it is an introspectively accessible fact that they carry ontological objective purport. In each case we argue that the answer is negative, on the grounds that cognitivist expressivism, despite repudiating ontological objectivity, can smoothly accommodate the introspectively accessible aspects of the phenomenological features in question.

Note well that this line of argument assumes only that cognitivist expressivism is a *credible candidate* for being the correct meta-ethical position—not that it *is* the correct position. If a credible candidate that eschews ontological objectivity can accommodate the introspectively accessible aspects of the relevant phenomenology, then that is enough to show that introspection alone does not yield a positive answer to the question whether moral phenomenology carries ontological objective purport.

These two principal steps in our argument will not quite establish the Neutrality thesis, because they do not preclude the possibility that introspection alone yields a *negative* answer to the question about ontological objective purport. But the Neutrality thesis does emerge as a corollary, given the very plausible claim (which we ourselves are happy to concede) that various ontologically objectivist meta-ethical positions can also accommodate the introspectively accessible aspects of moral phenomenology. So, by executing our two-step argument, we will have provided a defense of the Neutrality thesis—the claim that *introspectively accessible* aspects of direct moral experiences do not themselves determine an answer to the question about whether such experiences carry ontological objective purport. And the Neutrality thesis undermines the argument from phenomenological introspection, since that argument rests on the contention that *it is an introspectively accessible fact* that direct moral experiences carry ontological objective import. Thus, in order to ascertain whether or not experiences carry such purport, one must look to other considerations, including perhaps other types of moral experience and certain non-experiential metaethical considerations.⁴⁹

VII. The challenge

We think those who defend strong versions of moral objectivism, as well as those who hold error theories, tend to move too quickly from considerations of moral phenomenology to claims about the sort of objective pretensions allegedly possessed by the relevant phenomenology. We say this not only because philosophers have tended not to dwell on phenomenological detail, but also because there is one metaethical position, ‘cognitivist expressivism’, that (a) seems very promising in its capacity to accommodate the facts of moral phenomenology (without overlooking or distorting the facts in question) but which (b) denies that moral judgments are robustly objective. The seeming promise of this view is the basis for raising a challenge to advocates of the phenomenological argument. We challenge them to point to those putative aspects or elements of the phenomenology of direct moral experience whose ontological objectivist purport is introspectively accessible. More specifically, we challenge them to point to putative phenomenological aspects or elements that arguably cannot be accommodated by cognitivist expressivism. To flesh out this challenge, we first present a few of the key elements of cognitivist expressivism, and we then explain why and how this position can smoothly accommodate the phenomenology of direct moral experience.

Very brief introduction to cognitivist expressivism

Cognitivist expressivism is a metaethical position that is largely overlooked because of a widespread but (we claim) mistaken assumption—what we call the ‘semantic assumption’. According to this assumption, all beliefs are descriptive beliefs. To be more precise: according to this assumption all beliefs are to be understood as being a kind of commitment state—what we call an ‘is’ commitment state—with respect to some *way-the-world-might-be* content (i.e., some *descriptive* content). So, just as, for instance, one’s non-moral belief (at some time *t*) that John took out the trash is to be understood as one’s being is-committed (at *t*) to a particular descriptive content—that *John took out the trash*—so it is with moral belief (assuming that moral judgments are beliefs). The belief

that John *ought* to take out the trash is a matter of being is-committed to the following, putative, descriptive content: *that it ought to be that John takes out the trash*.

In both non-moral and moral cases, then, to believe is to be is-committed to a way the world might be, i.e., to a descriptive content. And so *if* moral ought-judgments are beliefs, then, according to the semantic assumption, they have *moral* descriptive content.⁵⁰ And if they do, then they purport to be about in the world (instantiated) moral properties. And furthermore, if one denies that there are any such properties instantiated by typical items of evaluation (actions, persons, institutions), then one is committed to an ontological error theory with respect to morals. This was Mackie's view⁵¹.

Cognitivist expressivism, on the other hand, rejects the semantic assumption. This view recognizes two importantly different species of belief: in addition to is-commitments (call them is-beliefs), there are ought-commitments (ought-beliefs). The latter sort of commitment states share much of the phenomenology of is-beliefs, and also share many key functional-role features possessed by is-beliefs. But, what distinguishes these two types of belief is the fact that an ought-belief involves a certain *kind* of commitment—an ought-commitment—directed toward a non-moral descriptive content. So, on this picture, to believe that John ought to take out the trash, is to be *ought-committed* to the non-moral descriptive way-the-world-might-be content: *that John takes out the trash*. You might put the idea here by saying that on this conception of moral belief, the *ought* is in the attitude, rather than in a descriptive content toward which one is (in an ought-ish way) committed.⁵²

This general conception of belief treats moral judgments as genuine beliefs, but strictly speaking it is non-committal with respect to whether moral beliefs *also* have moral descriptive content. So, the framework *could* be embraced by a moral realist: the claim would be that the belief that John ought to take out the trash, for example, is *both* an ought-commitment to the descriptive

content *that John takes out the trash* and an is-commitment to the putative moral-descriptive content *that John ought to take out the trash*. However, the framework is also compatible with denying that moral beliefs have moral descriptive content. In some of our past writings, we have argued for a non-error version of metaethical irrealism, in which we combine a cognitivist view of moral judgments (i.e., a view that construes them as genuine beliefs) with a non-descriptivist/irrealist view about such judgments. Hence, what we call cognitivist expressivism. On this view, then, there is no such way the world might be morally, as, for example, *John's taking out the trash being an action that ought to occur*. But there is a distinctive type of ought-commitment with respect to a descriptive way the world might be, as in *John's taking out the trash*. And this commitment state is a belief.

The challenge

Of course, there is much to do in defending a cognitivist version of expressivism, and elsewhere we have undertaken its defense.⁵³ The point we wish to make on this occasion is that this sort of view is a metaethical option which promises to accommodate the idea that moral judgments are genuine beliefs (a claim, by the way, that is not beyond question), yet denies that such judgments carry moral descriptive purport (and hence also denies that they carry ontological objective purport).

So, if the phenomenological argument is going to create a presumption in favor of an ontological conception of moral objectivity, its advocates will need to pinpoint features of concrete moral experience with objectivist ontological pretensions that are introspectively evident. Our challenge to the advocates of the phenomenological argument is to pinpoint those features of moral experience that supposedly support strong moral objectivity and argue that it is introspectively manifest that those features really do embody ontological-objectivist pretensions.

VIII. The phenomenology of unfittingness

In addition to the belief-like aspects of ought- judgments that are part of direct moral experiences, we have identified two other general features: (1) they involve a sense of felt demand

whose origin is ‘external’, and (2) this felt demand is phenomenologically grounded in a sense (‘apprehension’) of fittingness. Do either of these features, perhaps in combination, carry ontological objective purport of a sort that is introspectively accessible in direct moral experiences?

Clearly the affective element involved in feeling a demand, which Mandelbaum describes as a pressure or tension, does not itself carry any sort of objective purport. The fact that one feels a pull to perform an action or refrain from performing one is something one often experiences without the experience carrying any presumption of objectivity. I feel tempted by the piece of chocolate cake on the table before me and it is as if it were screaming ‘Eat me!!!’ that seems to be tugging me in its direction.⁵⁴ But here one experiences no objective purport.

Of course, the crucial element of felt demand is the ‘external’ origin of the vector-like force; the fact that the demand is, as Mandelbaum says, ‘emanating from “outside” us’, which he glosses as independent of one’s desires. Moreover, this sort of demand is experienced as grounded in one’s sense that such and so action is an unfitting as response to those ‘external’ circumstances. The notions of fittingness and unfittingness are, of course, relational; as Mandelbaum sometimes puts it: to say that an action is unfitting in relation to a particular set of circumstances, is to say that features of those circumstances ‘call for’ one’s refraining from performing the action. So, if direct moral experiences carry ontological objective purport in a way that is introspectively manifest, then it would seem to be located in the following complex experience: *a concrete action being called for by desire-independent features of one’s present circumstances*. As explained earlier, if a view like cognitivist expressivism, which denies that moral experiences carry descriptive purport, can accommodate the introspectively manifest aspects in question (regardless of whether this type of view can fully accommodate the phenomenology), and can do so at least as well as a view that attributes to the phenomenology descriptive purport, then we will have secured the Neutrality thesis. To be clear, even if cognitivist expressivism can accommodate the introspectively accessible aspects of moral

phenomenology as well as any competing ontological objectivist metaethical view, this does not show that those aspects don't carry ontological objectivist purport. Rather, what it shows (we claim) is that whether or not the aspects in question do carry such purport is not something that is *introspectively accessible*—and that is enough to establish the Neutrality thesis. We now proceed to sketch two interpretations—a cognitivist expressivist interpretation and an ontological objectivist interpretation—to lay bare how they each purport to account for Mandelbaumian direct moral experiences.

Two pictures

We have lately called attention to how cognitivist expressivism understands direct moral ought-judgments as a kind of belief. What does the view say about direct moral experiences of being called upon by desire-independent considerations such that these experiences would have an objective feel to them? There are two essential ideas. First, direct moral experiences qua moral have to do with taking what we will rather vaguely call a 'non-self-privileging' stance toward one's action and circumstances. Taking this sort of stance involves being open to being affected by desire-independent considerations that have largely to do with not harming others. Different normative moral theories spell out this vague notion of non-self-privileging in different ways.

Second, and most crucially, in coming to have and experience oneself as being ought-committed to some course of action (or inaction), one experiences oneself as (1) *becoming ought-committed in a non-self-privileging way*, and (2) as becoming so committed *because of* certain non-normative factual considerations. The idea is that such judgment-involving experiences of direct moral obligation possess a kind of phenomenological *unity*: not only is one aware of some objective, non-normative features of some object of evaluation (*my having promised to take out the trash*), and not only does one experience oneself as becoming ought-committed to a certain non-normative descriptive way the world might be (*my taking out the trash*), but one experiences oneself as becoming thus ought-

committed *because* of those objective features one is aware of—and moreover as ought-committed *in a non-self-privileging way*. Direct experiences of moral unfittingness, then, are a matter of becoming ought-committed in a non-privileging way to a certain action, on the basis of (what one takes to be) objective in the world non-moral features.⁵⁵

It bears strong emphasis that this is a *two-step construal* of direct moral judgment. (The “steps” are conceptually-discernible *aspects*, which might or might not be sequential links in a causal sequence.) And the crucial point to appreciate, in distinguishing this non-ontological picture from an ontological picture, is the second step—the coming down *because* step. Here, it is important to notice that the ‘because’ is not simply a causal ‘because’. To construe it this way would be to confuse matters of causal explanation with matters of normativity. So what this picture holds is that the second step involves what we may refer to as a *reasonish-because way* of coming to have an ought-commitment.

In illuminating this reasonish-because way of coming to be ought-committed, cognitivist expressivism will want to approach the state of mind corresponding to this way of coming down in a manner similar to how the view approaches ought-judgments themselves. As noted earlier, cognitivist expressivism understands ought-judgments as a *sui generis* kind of commitment state vis-à-vis a core descriptive content such as *John’s taking out the trash*. Cognitivist expressivism approaches unfittingness and fittingness judgments in the same way: as involving a kind of psychological commitment state vis-à-vis a *pair* of core descriptive contents that is not an is-commitment with respect to a putative in the world unfittingness fact. Theoretical understanding of such states comes from what we call ‘triangulation’—illumination of such psychological states not via some reductive account of them but in terms both their overall phenomenology and their constitutive role(s) in a morally-judging agent’s overall psychological economy. This is a project that we’ve partially addressed elsewhere and represents a central task for the expressivist.⁵⁶

Compare, to this two-step picture, the three-step picture that is apparently favored by the ontological moral objectivist. On the three-step construal, the following discernible aspects are allegedly involved: (1) apprehending some objective, non-normative, fact(s) (*my having promised to take out the trash*), (2) apprehending an objective unfittingness-fact (*my not taking out the trash being unfitting in relation to my having promised to take out the trash*), and (3) becoming ought-committed to some objective non-normative way the world might be (*my taking out the trash*) by virtue of step (2). On the picture we are urging, on the other hand, there is no such step (2). Although I do indeed apprehend my having promised to take out the trash *as a reason to take out the trash*, such reason-apprehension is constituted by becoming ought-committed in the manner described in the preceding paragraph. And that is a two-step process (albeit a process involving substantial phenomenological unity): (a) apprehending *my having promised to take out the trash*, and (b) becoming ought-committed to *my taking out the trash* in a way that is both non-self-privileging and reasonishwise based upon step (a).

So here we have two pictures of the phenomenology of moral unfittingness, and the question is whether there is any introspectively accessible reason (in direct moral experience) to favor one over the other? Our main claim in this paper is that it is not introspectively obvious one way or the other; that in order to decide the issue, one has to import non-phenomenological theoretical considerations into the metaethical debate between the two camps in question.

IX. Moral objectivity with a small ‘o’⁵⁷

Let us return for a moment to Mandelbaum’s claim that the phenomenology of direct moral experience has an ‘objective’ feel to it. Presumably, the objective feel of such experiences emerges from the aspects of phenomenology we have been describing. Can this sort of feel be accommodated by cognitivist expressivism? Indeed it can. In capturing the objective feel in question, there are two elements of such experiences that combine to carry a sort of non-ontological objectivist feel. First, one experiences oneself as judging in a non-self-privileging way—taking as it

were an impartial stance—and so less self-centered and more other-centered. Second, one experiences oneself as coming down on what one ought to do (or refrain from doing) in what we have called a ‘reasonish-because’ manner. So, one experiences oneself as judging in an impartial, non-arbitrary, reason-based manner. Call this conception of moral objectivity *small ‘o’ objectivity*; we think it nicely captures the kind of objectivity that is available to introspection when reflecting on direct moral experiences. As we have said, it remains possible that direct moral experiences also carry commitment to a stronger form of objectivity; but if so, this is not something that is introspectively accessible.

So, we claim that cognitivist expressivism, which does not construe moral judgments (or the experiences that embed them) as carrying strong ontological Objective purport (or rationalist Objective purport for that matter), can capture a notion of moral objectivity that seems to be all that is needed to fully accommodate the introspectively manifest aspects of direct moral experiences.

X. Objections and Replies

We anticipate various objections to the Neutrality thesis, at least as we have defended it. Here, in rapid-fire succession are those objections with our replies.

Mistake: Claim that our phenomenological description of direct moral experiences is mistaken; that we leave out or misdescribe some crucial, introspectively manifest, element that carries ontological objectivist purport and that is introspectively accessible.

Reply: We think of our defense of the Neutrality thesis as one that shifts a burden onto the backs of ontological moral objectivists: so our opponents need to point to those introspectively manifest features of direct moral experiences that cannot be accommodated by cognitivist expressivism as well as they can be accommodated by some form of ontological moral objectivism.

Misdescribe: Claim that it is introspectively obvious that cognitivist expressivism itself just misdescribes the moral phenomenology in question and that it is implausible for this reason. To be

more precise, the claim might be it is introspectively manifest that (a) moral judgments are beliefs, and (b) that beliefs are descriptive in their overall content. (To say, for instance, that the belief that John ought to take out the trash is ‘descriptive in its overall content’ is to say that the ‘that’-clause *that John ought to take out the trash* characterizes a descriptive way the world might be.)

Reply: Elsewhere, we argue against (b) partly on phenomenological grounds. We will not rehearse those grounds here. But it is worth noting that even if one insists that genuine *beliefs* must be descriptive, there is a position that is like cognitivist expressivism that construes ought-commitments as, say, quasi-beliefs, which would do the same work for us in defending the neutrality thesis as does cognitivist expressivism. It is also worth pointing out here that those who just insist that it is introspectively evident to them that their phenomenology does carry objectivist purport may be guilty of introspective confabulation. Generally speaking, it is easy to ‘read into’ one’s phenomenology what is not really there. For instance, I see a saguaro cactus that strikes me (based on how it looks) as being about 45 years old. I say, “Well, it looks about 45 years old.” But here it would be implausible to suppose that the property of being roughly 45 years old is something that is introspectively presented to me in my visual experience. Rather, the more intuitively plausible thing to say here is that based on my cacti experience, I’m able to reliably form beliefs about the age of cacti based on what is presented to me in my visual experience. Were I to introspect and conclude that my visual experience presents me with the property of being 45 years old, I would be guilty of introspective confabulation. A similar point holds, we think, for those who would attend to their direct moral experiences and claim that it is introspectively obvious that they are have a divine ‘stamp’ upon them or are of divine origin. And the same sort of confabulation is going on (we would claim) when some folks claim that it is introspectively obvious that their own phenomenology of direct moral experience (and perhaps their concrete moral experience generally) has ontologically

objectivist purport. Making this case is (we admit) beyond the scope of this paper; it is something we plan to explore in our work in progress.

Denial: Deny that cognitivist expressivism is an overall plausible metaethical view in ways other than not being able to accommodate the introspectively manifest features of direct moral experience.

Reply: This reply is beside the point. It is enough for our purposes that cognitivist expressivism (assuming it is a coherent metaethical option) can accommodate the introspectively manifest phenomenology of direct moral experiences. In any case, this reply requires going beyond the phenomenology in question and bringing forth various additional theoretical considerations that are relevant for evaluating a metaethical theory. Elsewhere (see note 41) we defend cognitivist expressivism as plausible on general philosophical grounds.

Limit: Claim that for all we have said, the phenomenology in question may carry ontological objectivist purport, even if such purport is not introspectively accessible.

Reply: We completely agree that this is an option. Our only aim was to take on the argument from *introspective* phenomenology. So even if moral phenomenology does carry this kind of purport, we think it is important to point out that this putative fact about the phenomenology is not reliably introspectible. And this may explain why moral philosophers disagree about the metaphysical purport of moral experiences of the sort we have considered.

Myopia: There are other types of concrete moral experience and there are other deeply embedded features of moral thought and discourse, including logical embedding, our critical moral practices, and moral deliberation, and some of these features (perhaps in combination) are best accommodated by an ontological objectivist metaethic.

Reply: Perhaps so. But as we've said, our aim in this paper was decidedly narrowly focused in order to examining one specific phenomenological argument. We admit that there is more work to be done in defending a metaethical view. It may be, for all we have said, that other types of concrete

moral experience involve introspectively manifest aspects that carry ontological objectivist purport, though we doubt it. Having made a case that one type of concrete moral experience is neutral on this issue, the burden is squarely on the shoulders of anyone who thinks some other type of moral experience does carry such purport—all the more so because the kinds of moral judgment we have focused on here, viz., direct judgments of moral obligation, are typically the ones most cited by advocates of the phenomenological argument. As for the thought that one must look beyond concrete moral experience to other features of moral thought and discourse in order to make a pro tanto case for ontological objective purport, we note that this thought is one way of making our main point. As we explained in section III, the argument from introspective phenomenology rests on the assumption that ontological objectivist purport can be read off from the phenomenology of concrete moral experiences without appealing to other features of moral thought and discourse.

Variability: one fundamental problem is that arguably moral phenomenology is theory-laden—theoretical assumptions including metaethical ones saturate moral experience. Thus, in all likelihood, the moral phenomenologies of different individuals will vary with respect to whether their moral experiences carry objective purport in general, and whether their direct moral experiences carry introspectively manifest ontological objectivist purport.

Reply: this raises large methodological issues that we cannot pursue here.⁵⁸ However, this objection is bad news for the argument from introspective phenomenology. As we explained in section III, the argument rests on the assumption that the phenomenology of moral experience involves aspects that are pre-theoretically there in the phenomenology, widely shared, and about which we can then theorize. If these assumptions are false, then this is a problem for the argument. Furthermore, even if there is such variability, there may still be a ‘core’ phenomenological layer that is common. (We ourselves think there is.) If so, then this is where the present debate should be focused.

XI. Conclusion

We began with a commonly expressed appeal to moral experience and its phenomenology as a basis for favoring some form of ontological moral objectivism. We also began with the idea that this sort of argument, so far as we can tell, tends to focus on concrete moral experiences of obligation and value. So we decided to focus on a very common sort of concrete moral experience—what Mandelbaum calls ‘direct moral experiences of obligation’—as a basis for exploring what we call the argument from introspective phenomenology. According to this argument, there are introspectively manifest aspects of direct moral experiences that have moral ontological objectivist purport. We challenge this claim. We maintain that the introspectively manifest aspects of such moral experiences do not determine whether they have this kind of objectivist purport. This is our neutrality thesis, which we defended by explaining how our version of cognitivist expressivism can fully accommodate the introspectively manifest data of direct moral experiences, including the objectivist character of such experiences.⁵⁹

¹ Below, in section II, we discuss the subject matter and method of phenomenology in general, and in section IV we say more about the subject matter and method of *moral* phenomenology.

² Nor have they spent much time grappling with questions about the scope, unity, and distinctiveness of moral phenomenology. One major exception is Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (Glencoe, Ill: The New Press, 1955). More recently, we ourselves have broached such questions in Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, “Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory,” *Philosophical Issues* 15 (2005): 56-77 and in “Prolegomena to a Future Phenomenology of Morals,” *Philosophy and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, special issue on moral phenomenology edited by Uriah Kriegel, forthcoming, 2007. **Details to be added**

³ By ‘introspectively accessible elements’ we mean elements that are readily introspectively accessible by people with ordinary introspective acuity—as distinct, for instance, from elements that are introspectively accessible only by people with unusually powerful and accurate introspective skill.

⁴ We also believe—although we will not argue for this here—that moral experiences in fact do *not* carry ontological objective purport. But even if we happen to be wrong about this, we still could be right about the Neutrality thesis. The truth of the Neutrality thesis would be enough to undercut the argument from phenomenological introspection—even if that argument’s conclusion happens to be correct.

⁵ Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, “Nondescriptivist Cognitivism: Toward a New Metaethic,” *Philosophical Papers* 29 (2000): 121-153, and “Cognitivist Expressivism,” in T. Horgan and M. Timmons, eds., *Metaethics after Moore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Although the construal of moral phenomenology that we will explore below is not *ontologically* objectivist, nevertheless it does recognize and accommodate phenomenological features of direct moral judgment that count intuitively as objective. See section IX below.

⁶ Of course if cognitivist expressivism cannot accommodate the phenomenological data, and if no other metaethical view that rejects ontological objectivism can do so either, this does not yet guarantee that the argument goes through. For, it might be that the phenomenological data can be accommodated by some form of metaethical rationalism that denies ontological moral objectivism.

⁷ Some moral realists prefer to characterize realism (including moral realism) in terms of ‘stance-independence’ rather than in terms of ‘mind-independence’. See Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15-16. Whether this way of characterizing realism allows for a response-dependent account of secondary qualities to count as realist will depend on how one understands the notion of stance.

⁸ This is how John McDowell, “Values and Secondary Qualities,” in T. Honderich, ed., *Morality and Objectivity* (London: Routledge, 1985), 170 characterizes a kind of objectivity characteristic of secondary qualities (understood as response-dependent) that he contrasts with a stronger kind that does not recognize response-dependent properties as being objective. See also Jonathan Dancy, “Two Conceptions of Moral Realism,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 60 (1985): 167-187.

⁹ For more discussion of these two conceptions, see Mark Timmons, “Objectivity in Moral Discourse,” in *Elsevier Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (2006).

¹⁰ Roderick Firth, “Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952): 317-345. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (*Akademie* volume IV, 1985), 389, ed. [trans.] Mary J. Gregor, *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44-45.

¹² J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), chapter 1.

¹³ Note that if one claims both that (1) moral properties are analogous to primary qualities in being human-response independent and (2) that they are intrinsically reason-providing, then one seems committed to the rationalist claim that recognition of moral properties provides all rational agents with reasons. This seems to be why Mackie thought that moral thought and discourse presuppose both ontological and rationalist conceptions of objectivity.

¹⁴ This seems to be the view that Smith is advocating in Michael Smith, “Objectivity and Moral Realism: On the Significance of the Phenomenology of Moral Experience,” reprinted in M. Smith, ed., *Ethics and the A Priori* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ The idea that certain forms of discourse including mathematics, logic, and ethics can be objective—that claims in these areas can be objectively true—without there having to be a realm of objects and properties that make them true is one main theme of Hilary Putnam’s Hermes Lectures, published as Part I of *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See in particular, Lecture 3, ‘Objectivity without Objects’.

¹⁶ R. M. Hare, “Objective Prescriptions,” *Philosophy* 35 (1993): 1-17.

¹⁷ Perhaps an objective moral property can be constructed from the components that Hare posits. But it is enough for present purposes to note, as we do, that embracing rationalist objectivism but denying ontological objectivism is *prima facie* a metaethical option.

¹⁸ Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), 311.

¹⁹ Charles Siewert, for instance, in his “Who’s Afraid of Phenomenological Disputes?,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* XLV (2007): (page nos. to be added) understands phenomenology as primarily methodological.

²⁰ There are various ways that one might widen *somewhat* the scope of phenomenal consciousness, while still regarding its scope as fairly restricted. For instance, one might hold that moods and/or emotions—in addition to sensations and sensory images—have distinctive phenomenal character.

²¹ Ned Block, “On a Confusion about a Conception of Consciousness,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18 (1995): 227-47.

²² For a defense of this broader conception of the scope of phenomenal consciousness, see for instance Terry Horgan and John Tienson, “The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality,” in David Chalmers, ed., *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 520-33, Terry Horgan, John Tienson, and George Graham, “Phenomenal Intentionality and the Brain in a Vat,” in Richard Schantz, ed., *The Externalist Challenge* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 297-317, Uriah Kriegel, “Consciousness as Sensory Quality and as Implicit Self-Awareness,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 2 (2003), 1-26, , David Pitt, “The Phenomenology of Cognition or What is it Like to Think That P?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69 (2004): 1-36, and Galen Strawson, *Mental Reality* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2004).

²³ These intentionalist views bifurcate into two broad kinds: one kind maintains that all phenomenal character is sensory or sensory imagistic (while yet insisting that phenomenal character is also inherently intentional); the other kind maintains that the scope of phenomenal consciousness is much broader, encompassing all (or virtually all) mental states that are conscious-as-opposed-to-unconscious. The former view is advocated, for instance, in Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), and Fred Dretske, *Naturalizing the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995). The latter view is advocated, for instance, in the texts mentioned in note 22 above.

²⁴ For some discussion of this matter, see Charles Siewert, “Who’s Afraid of Phenomenological Disputes?”

²⁵ See, for instance, Susanna Siegel, “Which Properties are Represented in Perception?” in T. Gendler Szabo and John Hawthorne, eds., *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and “The Phenomenology of Efficacy,” *Philosophical Topics* 33 (2005): pages to be added

²⁶ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 4.

²⁷ Note, though, that careful application of the introspective method—or of mixed methodology that is partly phenomenological and partly abductive—might well be very relevant to such disputes. See, for instance, Siegel’s mixed-method argumentation for the claim that causation is represented in visual-perceptual experience in Siegel, “Which Properties are Represented in Perception?” and “The Phenomenology of Efficacy.”

²⁸ Roderick Chisholm, “The Problem of the Speckled Hen,” *Mind* 51 (1942): 368-373.

²⁹ For more on this theme, see Terry Horgan, “Agentive Phenomenology and the Limits of Introspection,” *Psyche*, in press. Details to be added

³⁰ Our broad characterization of moral phenomenology allows for experiences (or elements of them) that give rise to moral judgments to be included within the purview of moral phenomenology. For example, my experiencing a certain contemplated action as being (in relation to certain elements of my circumstances) unfitting may result in my morally coming down on the matter and judging that the action is all-in unfitting and ought not to be done. (For more on the distinction between experiences of prima facie and of all-in unfit and fit, see note 55 below.) And, of course, our characterization allows for experiences that include (perhaps exclusively) the having or making a moral judgment. (This particular point about the breadth of moral phenomenology is prompted by some remarks by Philip Pettit in conversation.)

³¹ The following point bears emphasis. If indeed not all aspects of mentality that belong to the *subject matter* of phenomenology are introspectively accessible (say, because some aspects of phenomenal character are not thus accessible but are present in experience nonetheless), then the distinctive phenomenological *method* (viz., introspection) will not suffice by itself to answer all pertinent questions about the subject matter. Other methods will need to be brought to bear too, over and above introspection.

³² Note that what we are here calling *theoretical* semantic issues are meant to be distinct from issues concerning the introspectively accessible content of intentional mental states.

³³ Pro tanto, rather than complete in itself, because one theoretical option is an error theory asserting both (1) that it is an introspectively accessible fact that direct moral experience carries ontologically objective purport, (2) there there are no in-the-world moral properties or facts, and hence (3) that direct moral experience is systematically nonveridical in its intentional content. Those who seek to defend moral realism by appeal to the argument from phenomenological introspection need to say something about the theoretical disadvantages of such an error theory, in comparison to moral realism.

³⁴ Hubert I. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, “What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Expertise,” in D. Russmussen, ed., *Universalism vs. Communitarianism: Contemporary Debates in Ethics*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 237-264.

³⁵ This is not to deny that in many cases, one’s moral emotions ‘run ahead’ of one’s first order moral judgments: in thinking about some past action of his, John begins to have feelings of guilt and it is through his guilt feelings that he comes to realize the wrongness of what he did.

³⁶ Mandelbaum, *Phenomenology*, p. 127.

³⁷ Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review* 108 (2001): 818.

³⁸ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 4.

³⁹ Cases involving intuitive moral judgments are to be contrasted with those of ‘ethical comportment’ that the Dreyfus brothers discuss in “What is Morality?” in which one spontaneously responds as a matter of reflex—experiences that do not seem to involve having or making a moral judgment—not even a *spontaneous* judgment that generates spontaneous, unhesitating, behavior.

⁴⁰ Strictly speaking, moral experiences might exhibit some common features that serve in a weak sense to unify them; however, it is possible that such common features do not serve to distinguish moral experiences from certain types of non-moral normative experiences. For more on this see Terry Horgan and Mark

Timmons, “Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory.” See also Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ‘Is Moral Phenomenology Unified?’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6 (forthcoming, 2007): pages to be added.

⁴¹ ‘Levels’ is our term, but it is seeming appropriate given Mandelbaum’s talk of felt demand being ‘grounded in’ one’s apprehension of fittingness or unfittingness.

⁴² Mandelbaum, *Phenomenology*, p. 54.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁷ For more on this point, see T. Horgan and M. Timmons, “Prolegomenon.” Interestingly, R. Chisholm, “Practical Reason and the Logic of Requirement,” reprinted in J. Raz, ed., *Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 118-127, distinguishes two senses of fittingness, a strong and a weak sense, both of which he defines in terms of requiredness. (Chisholm mentions Mandelbaum.)

⁴⁸ The view we describe does treat moral judgments as *objective*, in a specific sense to be described in section IX below. But the view is a form of expressivism, and so it also treats moral judgments as being non-descriptive in their overall content. This precludes them from carrying *ontological* objective purport, because the latter is a species of descriptive content.

⁴⁹ Here again we emphasize that our thesis concerns what is introspectively accessible in order to distinguish what we are calling the Neutrality these from a stronger neutrality thesis according to which moral phenomenology itself is neutral with respect to ontological objective purport.

⁵⁰ Here, we mean to be using the term ‘descriptive,’ as applied to content talk, to include content that purports to attribute irreducibly normative properties to items of evaluation. On this usage, Mackie’s claim that moral judgments purport to ascribe to actions the alleged normative property *to-be-pursuedness* counts as a construal according to which such judgments possess descriptive content.

⁵¹ J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977): ch. 1.

⁵² On our view, the *is* in the case of is-belief is also in the attitude. The idea is that the descriptive content of a belief—of either an is-belief or an ought-belief—is most perspicuously expressed not by a declarative sentence but rather by a ‘that’-clause like ‘that John takes out the trash’ (or by a nominalized sentence such as ‘John’s taking out the trash’). In English, an is-commitment is canonically expressed linguistically by asserting a complete sentence in the declarative mood—as in ‘John took out the trash’. An ought-commitment is canonically expressed by asserting a declarative-mood sentence whose predicative constituent comprises the modal auxiliary ‘ought’ appended to an infinitival verb—as in ‘John *ought to take out* the trash’. But on our account, the logical structure of is-beliefs and ought-beliefs is more perspicuously revealed via sentences employing a commitment-operator applied to a descriptive ‘that’-clause, thus: ‘*It is the case* that John takes out the trash’, ‘*It ought to be the case* that John takes out the trash’.

⁵³ Terry Hogan and Mark Timmons, “Nondecriptivist Cognitivism: Outline of a New Metaethic,” *Philosophical Papers* 29 (2000): 121-53, “Expressivism, Yes! Relativism, No!” in Russ Shafer-Landau, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), “Cognitivist Expressivism,” in Terry Horgan and M. Timmons, eds., *Metaethics after Moore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ This cake example is from Elizabeth L. Beardsley’s, “Moral Experience and Ethical Analysis,” *The Philosophical Review* 68 (1959), 519-530 critical review of Mandelbaum’s book.

⁵⁵ The moral experiences that we are here calling direct ought-judgment involving moral experiences are *all-in* moral experiences of moral unfittingness. We also recognize moral experiences of unfittingness that are like all-in moral experiences except one does not come to feel ought-committed, rather, one only experiences oneself as having a *tendency* to feel ought-committed. Cases in which one would find oneself ought-committed were the relevant non-normative feature in question the only feature one takes to be *a* reason. In contrast to all-in experiences of unfit (or fit), such cases are those of *prima facie* unfit (or fit).

This distinction between two types of experiences of moral unfittingness bears on an example that Julia Driver described (in conversation) in which one comes across a pigeon lying on the ground (apparently hit by a car) that is in pain and obviously can’t be saved. One can walk away or crush its skull thereby putting it out of its misery. One judges that it is morally best (and hence fitting) to crush the pigeon’s skull, but in doing so

takes the act of crushing to be unfitting. So in this case the putting the pigeon out of its misery is experienced as fitting, but the act of crushing is experienced as unfitting. Driver asked whether our model of moral experience, featuring as it does experiences of unfit and fit, can handle this case. Given what we have just said above about the distinction between all-in experiences of moral unfittingness (and fittingness) and cases of experiences of prima facie moral unfittingness, we can say of Driver's case that on the one hand, given the fact that the act in question is a crushing of a live animal's skull, one experiences the contemplated action as prima facie unfitting. But, given the fact that the animal is suffering and can't be saved, one experiences the act as prima facie fitting. So, on our picture one has a tendency to feel ought-committed to crushing the skull and an opposing tendency to feel ought-committed to refraining from crushing the skull. As in typical cases of conflicts of prima facie duties, one must determine which consideration is all-in or most fitting in the circumstances.

⁵⁶ In the formal language featured in Horgan and Timmons, "Cognitivist Expressivism", judgments of the form, *I ought to do A (now)* are rendered as $O[A]$, where 'O' expresses ought-commitment and 'A' expresses a descriptive way-the-world-might-be content (e.g., *that I take out the trash now*). Likewise, is-commitments are rendered as $I[A]$. And so ' $O[A]$ ' is the canonical way of expressing linguistically one's state of being ought-committed to a descriptive content, which is how cognitivist expressivism understands direct moral ought-judgments. As we've said, the idea is that the 'ought' is in the attitude of the psychological state, not in the content toward which the attitude is directed. The formal language also generates constructions corresponding to a whole hierarchy of logically complex commitment states—e.g., commitment states of the type $\{I[]$ or $O[]\}$, where such a commitment state obtains with respect to a *pair* of descriptive contents expressible by 'that'-clauses that would be inserted into the respective bracketed slots. To capture unfittingness judgments in such a formal language, a natural idea would be to augment the range of logically complex formal-language constructions to incorporate an adverbial operator that expresses the "reasonish because" manner of judging. Judgments of the form, *it would be unfitting for me not to take out the trash now because I've promised to do so*, or equivalently, *my promising to take out the trash at this time is a reason for why I ought to take it out now*, can be rendered: $R(I[B])\{O[A]\}$, which expresses a logically complex commitment state of being

ought-committed to a certain non-moral descriptive content (viz., that I take out the trash now) in a for-the-reason-that *I promised to take it out* manner. (More precisely, the manner is a *for-the-reason-that-it-is-the-case*{*that I promised to take out the trash*} manner.) I.e., this is a commitment state of logical type $R(I[])\{O[]\}$, with respect to the pair of descriptive contents *that I promised to take out trash* and *that I take out the trash now*. (We assume here that one takes the reason to be an all-in reason for the ought-judgment.) Of course, this for-the-reason-I[] manner of becoming ought-committed is also a non-self-privileging manner, and so to capture this in our syntax, one might render the ought-operator thus: $O_i[A]$ for ‘ought-impartial’. So the full formal rendering of such an impartial, reasonish-because, manner of being ought committed would be this: $R([B])\{O_i[A]\}$. Again, such a logically complex commitment state is *not* an is-commitment with respect to a putative descriptive content, viz., *my having promised to take out the trash being a reason for my taking out the trash now*. On the contrary: according to cognitivist expressivism, there is no such descriptive content, and there is no such is-commitment to such a putative content.

⁵⁷ A phrase inspired by Putnam’s phrase, *realism with a small ‘r’*. See Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987), 17.

⁵⁸ Questions about theory-ladenness of moral experiences were raised in conversation by David Wong. Michael Gill in his “Variability and Moral Phenomenology”, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, forthcoming, 2007, pressed this same worry. We reply to Gill in our ‘Prolegomenon’ article.

⁵⁹ We wish to thank the audience at the 2006 Social Philosophy and Policy conference on objectivism, subjectivism and relativism in ethics for helpful comments. We recall in particular comments by Janice Dowell, Michael Huemer, Scott McDonald, Philip Pettit, David Shoemaker, and David Wong. We also benefited from comments from our colleagues Michael Gill and Uriah Kriegel.