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Moral Experience: Its Existence, Describability, and Significance

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Abstract :: One of the newest research areas in moral philosophy is *moral phenomenology*: the dedicated study of the experiential dimension of moral mental life. The idea has been to bring phenomenological evidence to bear on some central issues in metaethics and moral psychology, such as cognitivism and noncognitivism about moral judgment, motivational internalism and externalism, and so on. However, moral phenomenology faces certain foundational challenges, pertaining especially to the existence, describability, and importance of its subject matter. This paper addresses these foundational challenges, arguing that moral experiences – in the phenomenal, what-is-like sense of the term – exist, are informatively describable, and are central for the concerns of moral philosophy at large.

1. Introduction: Three Questions

In summarizing J.L. Mackie's (1977) argument for error theory, John McDowell writes:

J.L. Mackie insists that ordinary evaluative thought presents itself as a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world. And this phenomenological thesis seems correct. When one or another variety of philosophical non-cognitivism claims to capture the truth about what the experience of value is like, or (or in a familiar surrogate for phenomenology) about what we mean by our evaluative language, the claim is never based on careful attention to the lived character of evaluative thought... (McDowell 1985: 110)

Jonathan Dancy sounds a similar note:

[W]e take moral value to be part of the fabric of the world; taking our experience at face value, we judge it to be the experience of the moral properties of actions and agents in the world. And if we are to work with the presumption that the world is the way our experience represents it to us as being, we should take it in the absence of contrary considerations that actions and agents do have the sorts of moral properties we experience in them. This is an argument about the nature of moral experience, which moves from that nature to the probable nature of the world. (Dancy 1986: 172)

Further developing the phenomenological argument for moral cognitivism, Michael Smith writes:

... we are to argue that our concept of value is the concept of a property that is there to be experienced. The argument for this is to be phenomenological. We are to argue that evaluative experience presents itself to us as the experience of properties genuinely possessed by the objects that confront us. This phenomenological argument is to yield the conclusion that objects *seem* to have evaluative properties. (Smith 1993: 242)

My purpose here is not to evaluate the phenomenological arguments presented by Mackie, McDowell, Dancy, and Smith. My interest is rather in the very notion of phenomenological appeal in moral theory.

As the above quotations show, this kind of appeal has a venerable history in analytic moral philosophy. Yet it is only in the past decade or so that *moral phenomenology* has been explicitly treated (and pursued) as a self-standing area of research. To a first approximation, we may understand moral phenomenology as the dedicated study of the experiential dimension of moral mental life, where “experiential” in terms of phenomenal consciousness or what-it-is-like-ness (Horgan and Tienson 2005, 2008a, Kriegel 2008). The idea has been to bring phenomenological evidence to bear on some central issues in metaethics and moral psychology, such as cognitivism and noncognitivism about moral judgment (Horgan and Timmons 2006, Kriegel 2012), sentimentalism and rationalism (Gill 2009, Horgan and Timmons forthcoming), error theory and the objectivistic purport of moral thought and discourse (Loeb 2007, Horgan and Timmons 2008b), and so on.

There are, however, three foundational challenges moral phenomenology must overcome before we can take it seriously. In this section, I present the gist

of these challenges. In the following ones, I adduce preliminary considerations intended to address them.

The most basic challenge to moral phenomenology would be the claim that it has no subject matter. The claim can come in two grades. In its strong version, it would be that *there are no moral experiences*. In its weaker version, it would be that moral experiences *do not constitute a natural kind*: while there are many individual moral experiences, there is nothing unified about them. Compare: when philosophers claim that 'there is no such thing as emotion,' or that 'there are no concepts,' they typically turn out to mean only this: there is no natural homogeneity among the various things designated by 'emotion' or 'concept.'

Even if there is such a thing as (a unified) moral experience, it might be claimed that nothing informative could be said about it. After all, it is a common refrain in discussions of conscious experience that the phenomenal character of an experience, what it is like to have it, is *ineffable*. It is impossible to make a colorblind person appreciate the phenomenal character of seeing yellow. Such phenomenal character can be named or labeled, but it cannot be described or communicated; there is no informative account of it to be had.

Granted that moral experience exists and is describable, it is unclear what significance it has within our overall moral life. In general, it is widely thought today that conscious experience is but the tip of the mental iceberg: most of what goes on in our mind, determining our behavior and capturing our personality and deepest commitments, goes on below the threshold of conscious awareness. If so, understanding the moral dimension of our mental life requires in the first instance illumination of those more obscured parts, through the patient study of relevant subpersonal cognitive processes, unconscious habits, and so on. Our phenomenological impressions of our moral mental life provide only the most superficial understanding.

Moral phenomenology faces a steep challenge, then. To convince us to pursue it, its proponents must provide satisfactory answers to the following three nested questions:

- a) Is there such a thing as moral experience?
- b) If there is such a thing as moral experience, can it be informatively described?
- c) If there is such a thing as moral experience, and it can be informatively described, is it important for an understanding of moral mental life?

I will now offer some considerations suggesting positive answers to all three questions.

2. The Existence Question

The existential challenge to moral phenomenology, recall, comes in two grades: the strong version claims that there are no moral experiences, the weaker one that moral experiences do not form a natural kind. The strong claim can be put to rest by citing moral mental states in which there is something it is like to be. *Prima facie* candidates include:

1. Thinking that I ought to visit my great aunt in hospital
2. Judging that genocide is wrong
3. Having the intuition that it is permissible to redirect the trolley
4. Feeling a strong desire to meet one's professional duties in one's new job
5. Taking the decision to make it up to someone
6. Seeing that what the cat-torturing kids are doing is wrong
7. Feeling indignant about US police killing another unarmed African-American
8. Feeling guilty about not helping a blind person cross the street
9. Feeling deep respect for someone

The items on this list can be divided into four groups. Let us briefly consider each group's potential of providing instances of moral experiences.

Items 1-3 are cognitive, or intellectual, mental states. As such, many might argue that they have no phenomenal character, and thus do not qualify as experiences in the phenomenal sense. Others, however, will defend so-called cognitive phenomenology (Strawson 1994 Ch1, Pitt 2004, Chudnoff 2015), and

so consider 1-3 genuinely phenomenal.¹ Moreover, most proponents of cognitive phenomenology hold that there is a kind of intentional content that it ground. Since the contents of 1-3 are clearly moral, involving as they do moral concepts (ought, wrong, permissible), they would then qualify as proper objects of moral phenomenology. Accordingly, some have developed a phenomenology of moral beliefs (Horgan and Timmons 2007) or of moral intuitions (Bedke 2008). At the same time, many still resist the notion of cognitive phenomenology (Robinson 2006, Carruthers and Veillet 2011), and would presumably reject a phenomenology of moral cognition.

Second, items 4-5 are broadly 'conative' or 'motivational' states – states of the will whereby a subject exercises her agency. Traditionally, such states were thought to be best understood in terms of their distinctive functional role in guiding action. More recently, there has been an increasingly lively debate over the existence of a 'phenomenology of agency' that outstrips the purely sensory experience of bodily exertion (Bayne 2008, Mylopoulos 2015; but see Ginet 1986 for an early discussion). As in the case of 1-3, there is no question that 4-5 are moral mental states; the main bone of the contention is whether they are phenomenal ones. (In the background is also a question about what it takes for a property to be phenomenal – a question I will set aside here, relying entirely on the reader's intuitive grasp of the notion.²)

In contrast, item 6 is a perceptual state, so its status as phenomenal is not in question. Moreover, its content is clearly moral. Traditionally, however, philosophers have been skeptical of the very *existence* of moral perception, typically on the grounds that moral properties are not sensible: 'There is no such thing as a sensation having as its object a quality called moral goodness' (Brentano 1876: 74; see also McBrayer 2010). Presumably, the idea is that strictly speaking what we perceive is just the (nonmoral) supervenience base of moral properties; the moral properties themselves are represented only post-perceptually. For example, although we may describe ourselves as seeing the kindness or generosity shown by one person to another, what is strictly perceptible in the exchange are certain nonmoral properties of the persons' behavior, which properties "subvene" kindness or generosity. In recent

philosophy, however, there have been several spirited defenses of genuine moral perception (Harman 1977 Ch1, Cuneo 2003, McGrath 2004, Audi 2013).

The dialectical situation with moral perception is the opposite of that with moral cognition and moral agency: there is no question whether perceptual states can be phenomenal, but there is a question whether they can be moral; whereas with cognitive and conative states there is no question that they can be moral, and the only question is whether they can be phenomenal.

From this perspective, moral *emotions* – items such as 7-9 – represent the most promising candidate moral experiences. It is widely accepted, both traditionally and in contemporary philosophy of mind, that emotional states can be felt and have phenomenal character, but also that they are often moral. Moral emotions such as guilt, shame, repentance, indignation, contempt, outrage, resentment, respect, pride, compassion, sympathy, and gratitude are routinely felt and thus occur consciously.

It remains that they may have nothing in common in virtue of which they *are* moral experiences. That is, they may not constitute a natural kind. For even if there was consensus on the full list of all and only moral experiences, three questions arise. The first:

- Is there a phenomenal property ϕ , such that *all* moral experiences exhibit ϕ ?

Such a property would represent a *phenomenal commonality* of moral experiences: something they all share qua moral experiences. A second, complementary question is:

- Is there a phenomenal property Ψ , such that *only* moral experiences exhibit Ψ ?

This would be a *phenomenal peculiarity* of moral experience – something distinctive of moral experiences that sets them apart from other mental states. A third question is:

- Might $\phi = \Psi$?

Might the property common to all moral experiences be also peculiar to them? If so, there is a single phenomenal property that all and only moral experiences exhibit. If an experience exhibits it, then it is a moral experience, and if it does not, then it is not. We may call such a property the 'phenomenal signature' of moral experience.³

If there is a phenomenal signature of moral experience, then moral experiences constitute a natural kind after all – a kind all of whose members share a 'natural' or objective similarity. But is there an argument for a phenomenal signature of morality? Persuasive arguments to the contrary have certainly been presented (Sinnott-Armstrong 2008), though capable responses have been offered as well (Glasgow 2013). What I want to argue here is rather that the question of signature is less crucial to moral phenomenology than might be thought.

Consider the fundamental issue surrounding any controversial type of phenomenality. So far, we have treated that question as a simple existential question: does the relevant phenomenality exist or not? In reality, however, the question is subtler. It is not a simple yes/no question, but rather invites a choice among three possible positions: eliminativist, reductivist, and primitivist. The debate over cognitive phenomenology, for example, pits against each other (i) proponents of a sui generis cognitive phenomenality characteristic of the experience of thinking and (ii) opponents who claim that there is nothing it is like to think (Nelkin 1989); in addition, however, there is an intermediate view which (iii) recognizes that there is something it is like to think but attempts to account for it in terms of already familiar forms of sensory phenomenality (e.g., the experience of silent-speech imagery, perhaps augmented with attentional foregrounding effects). Position (i) is a form of primitivism about cognitive phenomenality, (iii) a kind of reductivism about it, while (ii) is straightforwardly eliminativist.

Note, now, that the same three options present themselves in moral phenomenology – *regardless of whether there is a phenomenal signature of moral experience*. To be sure, we can formulate a similar triad about whether (i) the phenomenal signature exists and is irreducible to any other phenomenal

property, (ii) does not exist at all, or (iii) exists but reduces to some combination of (say) sensory, motivational, and cognitive phenomenal characters. Even if we opt for eliminativism here, though, we can still pose the question of elimination, reduction, or primitivism for individual *types* of putative moral experience. Thus, we still need to choose between the eliminativist view that there is nothing it is like to experience indignation, a primitivist view that indignation has a *sui generis* phenomenal character, and the reductivist view that the phenomenal character of indignation is nothing but a certain combination of (say) negative visceral sensations, conscious thoughts about an injustice, and felt motivation to rectify that injustice.

The point is that to debate the correct choice between primitivism, reductivism, and eliminativism about indignation, or respect, or any other moral experience is already to engage in moral phenomenology. The existence of a phenomenal signature of moral experience is not a precondition for engaging in moral phenomenology. (Indeed, it may be rightly seen as one of the issues within moral phenomenology.)

3. The Describability Question

The stance one takes on the existence of some moral experience affects what approach is most suitable for its phenomenological characterization. If one is an eliminativist about the experience of indignation, say, then obviously, one takes it that there is no phenomenality in need of characterization. If one is a reductivist, however, the natural approach is to list all phenomenal elements the combination of which constitutes the phenomenal character of the experience of indignation. For example, if one holds that the phenomenal character of indignation reduces to a complex of sensory, motivational, and cognitive phenomenal characters, then by comprehensively listing those sensory, motivational, and cognitive elements, one would exhaustively characterize what it is like to feel indignation.

A more delicate question arises within the primitivist framework. Suppose the phenomenal character of feeling respect for persons is simple and

unanalyzable; how could we hope to offer a substantive and informative description of it?

The problem is not special to *moral* phenomenology, of course – any phenomenological inquiry faces it. In other areas of inquiry, the standard approach is to understand primitives in terms of their *theoretical role* within a dominant theory in the area. Consider an analogy from mathematics. The notions appearing in the theorems of Euclidean geometry are defined in terms of notions appearing in the system's axioms.⁴ But the notions appearing in the axioms cannot all be defined in terms of more fundamental notions; instead, some must be understood in terms of their *role* within the axioms. Thus, Peano (1889) managed to define all geometric notions in terms of three fundamental ones (point, segment, motion), but the latter he left undefined. Still, these undefined notions must be understood somehow. The way mathematicians typically understand them is in terms of their place in the axioms. We can think of the axioms as describing a web of interrelations among nodes, with each node designated by a different primitive notion; the meaning of these nodes is *exhausted* by the interrelations specified in the axioms.

If we are primitivist about the phenomenal character of respect, then, we may still envisage a comprehensive moral theory that includes fundamental (underived) theses about respect-experience and identify the theoretical role of respect-experience within it. Consider the following Kantian fundamental claims about respect:

- “Respect for the [moral] law, which in its subjective aspect is called moral feeling, is identical with consciousness of one’s duty.” (Kant 1797/1996: 210)
- “Respect is properly the representation of worth that infringes upon my self-love.” (Kant 1785/1997: 14)
- “... a human being regarded as a person, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price [and] exacts respect for himself from all other rational beings in the world...” (Kant 1797/1996: 186-7)

Through a sufficiently textured theoretical role of this sort (typically regimented through a so-called Ramsey sentence [see Lewis 1972]), we obtain a certain characterization of respect-experience.

It might be complained that although a theoretical role captures the *relational profile* of a phenomenon – its web of central connections to other phenomena – it provides us with no perspective on the *intrinsic nature* of the phenomenon. But this is not special to the phenomenological domain; we find it also in scientific theorizing about fundamental properties. In mapping out the laws governing the interactions of bosons and fermions, microphysics instructs us on the relational profile of mass, but contains no perspective on mass' intrinsic nature.

In fact, in the phenomenological domain we have some hope of gathering an independent insight into intrinsic nature that in the physical domain we cannot really – through what we might call *contrastive introspective revelation*. Let me explain this notion in three steps.

According to the *revelation* theory of color, we do not come to understand the nature of colors by appreciating the right philosophical (or other) theory (Johnston 1992). For example, we cannot grasp the nature of blue by digesting some philosophical theory (objectivism, dispositionalism, or other). Rather, we grasp the nature of blue by looking at the sky on a clear day with a properly functioning visual system. When we look at a paradigmatic color in the right conditions, and everything goes well, we are acquainted with the nature of that color. The basic idea in the background – profound for philosophers but perhaps obvious otherwise – is that the intellect (“reason”) is not the only faculty through which we may grasp the deep nature of a property. Sometimes the eyes can disclose the nature of a property better – to provide *in-sight* into it. And other faculties may do so in other cases.

This revelation approach applies rather naturally to phenomenal properties. Perhaps the intellect is best positioned to disclose the nature of phenomenal properties that arise from combinations of more basic ones. But when it comes to the most basic, elemental phenomenal properties, it is rather *direct introspective encounter* that best positions us to grasp the intrinsic nature

of the property. We come to appreciate the nature of the property of *being bluish*, for example, when we introspect a paradigmatically bluish experience and everything goes well. (I use “bluish” technically to refer to the phenomenal property that corresponds to blue.)

When a phenomenal primitive is introspectively salient, as tends to be the case with bluishness and pain, it is fairly clear how an “introspective revelation” theory works. But asked to directly introspect the nature of a putatively sui generis phenomenal character of indignation, or respect, most of us are likely to feel stumped: it is not clear “where to look” and “what to do.” For such relatively nuanced and elusive phenomenal properties, it appears crucial that we contemplate a variety of *phenomenal contrasts* that foreground the specific phenomenal primitive we are interested in and put it in sharper introspective relief. Thus, there are several types of experience that have something in common with, but also something crucially different from, indignation: notably anger and frustration, but also hurt, sorrow, and even surprise (indignation is typically elicited by something that in some sense we do not expect). To appreciate the nature of the phenomenal character of indignation, we must contemplate, side by side as it were, a paradigmatic experience of indignation and a paradigmatic experience of anger, a paradigmatic experience of indignation and a paradigmatic experience of frustration, a paradigmatic experience of indignation and a paradigmatic experience of sorrow, and so on. It is the moral phenomenologist’s task to provide the kinds of contrast that would bring out subtle phenomenal primitives from the sphere of moral experience (see, for an example, Horgan and Timmons forthcoming for a phenomenological contrast between indignation and frustration).

It is worth distinguishing here between a *dialectical* use of phenomenological contrasts, which serves to *argue* for the existence of some phenomenal features (see Siegel 2007), and an *ostensive* use, which serves only to focus on the mind of these features (Koksvik 2011). My claim is that moral phenomenology can, at the very least, avail itself of phenomenological contrasts in their ostensive capacity. The goal is to focus the mind on any phenomenal primitives moral experience might involve, as a complement to their more relational characterization in terms of theoretical role.

4. The Significance Question

As noted in §1, it is widely accepted today that conscious processes form the tip of the mental iceberg, and that most mental life – including our deepest dispositions and the habits most intimately tied to our behavior – takes place below the surface of conscious experience. Unconscious processes are also developmentally and evolutionarily prior to conscious processes. The latter are thus largely derivative phenomena, albeit ones particularly striking to us from the first-person perspective. Ontogenetically and phylogenetically, they are Johnny-come-latelys rather than foundational phenomena. If so, their study would seem to be of relatively secondary importance for a deep understanding of our moral mental life.

This problem is not special to *moral* phenomenology, of course; it affects all phenomenology alike. The phenomenologist's best response to it, I think, was already articulated by Paul Ricœur (1950: 22) in his inquiry into the phenomenology of will: causal processes underlying the operation of the will always proceed from the bottom up, that is, from subpersonal micro-processes to conscious macro-processes; but understanding of their nature tends to proceed from the top down, illuminating those subpersonal micro-processes in terms of their role in underwriting the conscious macro-processes of which we have immediate first-person insight. A parallel point can be made about *moral* mental life. Surely the causal processes subserving the experience of indignation are subpersonal and unconscious, and perhaps creatures can enter unconscious indignation states at various stages of ontogenetic and phylogenic development at which they are as yet unable to *experience* indignation. It remains that we classify those unconscious states as indignation, rather than as anger or as frustration, only because of what it *would* be like to experience them if one underwent them consciously.

In the background may be two different kinds of *curiosity*, motivating two different forms of understanding. Of any phenomenon, we may ask "How did it come to be?" but we may also ask "What is it?" The former question courts a causal answer, which tends to proceed from the bottom up, from micro to

macro, from part to whole, and from process onset to process product. But the second question is completely independent and can readily proceed from the top down, from macro to micro, and from whole to part. The point is that an answer to the “How did it come to be?” question does not automatically deliver an answer to the “What is it?” question. Sensitive to this distinction, Franz Brentano (1890) distinguished between *genetic* and *descriptive* psychology. The former provides causal explanation of the genesis of mental phenomena; the latter merely describes what the phenomena in need of explanation are. (That is, the former answers questions of the form “How did it come to be?,” the latter questions of the form “What is it?”)

As soon as we draw this distinction, we appreciate the manner in which descriptive psychology is prior in *the order of understanding* to genetic (or “explanatory”) psychology: in an ideal reconstruction of science, we would presumably proceed by first describing the phenomena in need of explanation and only then offering an explanation of them.⁵ Without knowing what “it” *is*, it is hard to see how we might be able to explain how “it” came to be. Thus, a descriptive psychology – read: phenomenology – of the experience of indignation must logically precede a causal explanation of how such an experience arises from the wealth of relevant underlying unconscious processes.

The difference between descriptive and explanatory psychology seems to reflect that between philosophical and scientific understanding: where science answers, in the first instance, causal questions of the form “How did it come to be?,” philosophy is interested primarily in essence and identity questions of the form “What (kind of thing) is it?” To that extent, we can see that moral phenomenology’s organizing question places it squarely within the project of moral philosophy.

Under certain assumptions, moral phenomenology may contribute to moral philosophy in very concrete and tangible ways. Consider the increasingly popular fitting attitude analysis of value, whereby we understand certain values in terms of the mental attitudes it is fitting, or appropriate, or in some sense correct, to take toward them. If we do in fact give priority to conscious manifestations of moral mental states in the order of understanding, then a

fitting attitude account of some value *V* would offer an understanding of *V* in terms of conscious manifestations of the attitude it is fitting to take toward items in *V*'s extension.

For example, one might develop a fitting guilt account of culpability or blameworthiness. A Ramsey sentence for guilty feelings would then capture the nature of blameworthiness, as that toward which it is fitting to have such feelings. In a similar vein, a fitting respect account of dignity would use the moral phenomenology of the experience of respect to illuminate the nature of dignity (see Kriegel forthcoming). A fitting *gratitude* account of beneficence would invite us to study the nature of beneficence by developing a phenomenological theory of the experience of gratitude. And the nature of justice and injustice might be illuminated by an account of the phenomenal character of indignation.⁶

It is worth noting that while a fitting attitude analysis of moral values makes moral phenomenology *obviously* relevant to moral theory, what is *required* for such relevance is much weaker. Perhaps the most immediate objection to fitting attitude analyses is a variant of the Euthyphro dilemma: is police brutality against unarmed African-Americans unjust because it is fitting to feel indignant about it, or is it on the contrary fitting to feel indignant about it because it is unjust? There is a strong intuition that the latter is the better order of explanation: the injustice itself grounds the fittingness of reacting with indignation, not the other way around. However, even if injustice grounds indignation fittingness rather than the other way round, the fact that the indignation is fitting only if an injustice has occurred suggests that the structure of injustice is somehow *reflected* in the character of indignation. If so, we can use a phenomenological analysis of fitting indignation to indirectly *bring out* certain features of (in)justice. The subtler the phenomenal features our analysis exposes, the more elusive the corresponding features of injustice.

It would seem, then, that all is required for moral phenomenology of indignation to inform moral theory of (in)justice is the biconditional: *x* is unjust *if and only if* it is fitting to feel indignant about *x*. Biconditionals of this sort are very plausibly associated with many central moral values. Fitting attitude

analyses ground such biconditionals' left-hand side in their right-hand side, the opposing accounts proceed inversely. But either way, insofar as an equivalence holds, phenomenological analysis of the fitting moral emotions is relevant to understanding moral values. Only the interpretation of this relevance will differ: on the value-first reading, phenomenal features of moral emotions will serve merely as *evidence* for corresponding features of moral values; on the fitting-attitude-first reading, the connection is more constitutive than evidential. Nonetheless, in both cases there is a sense in which, as long as the biconditional holds, our axiology will be "pegged" to our moral phenomenology.

Conclusion

If we want to understand the moral realm, it would be an intellectual missed opportunity to simply ignore our first-person insight into our moral experience. I have belabored the feasibility and relevance of a phenomenology of moral experience mostly because the notion is relatively foreign to analytic moral philosophy. But it is worth noting that the very same notion is virtually taken for granted in the moral philosophy of the Brentano School and the phenomenological movement (see Brentano 1889, Meinong 1894, Ehrenfels 1897, Scheler 1913, Mandelbaum 1955 *inter alia*). When reading this material, even with an analytic eye, it is striking just how rich and sophisticated the pursued inquiry into moral reality is. I have argued here that there are no foundational reasons to be skeptical of this kind of inquiry. First of all, it is clear that moral phenomenology *has a subject matter*: there clearly exist moral experiences, whether or not they share a phenomenal signature. Secondly, what it is like to undergo a moral experience is describable in a theoretically useful manner, and certainly directly graspable (with the aid of the right contrasts), even when primitive and irreducible. Finally, the highly plausible equivalence between moral values and fitting moral emotions, combined with a descriptive rather than explanatory emphasis in moral-psychological inquiry, casts moral phenomenology as centrally relevant to moral theory.⁷

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¹ Strawson, for example, argues that there is a phenomenal difference between listening to the news in French as someone who understands French and listening to them as someone who does not understand French. The difference, he claims, is in what he calls "understanding-experience": the experience of grasping the propositional content conveyed by the relevant sounds.

² In the literature, a certain movement may be discerned toward explicating phenomenality in terms of the characteristic intellectual puzzlement raised by the phenomenon of consciousness: phenomenality is that which is susceptible to an explanatory gap, or to zombie scenario, or the knowledge-argument reasoning, or the like (see Bayne 2009, Carruthers and Veillet 2011, Horgan 2011, Kriegel 2015 Ch1).

³ We can also speak of an "approximate phenomenal signature" or a "phenomenal near-signature" in case there is a phenomenal property that *most* moral experiences exhibit and/or *almost* all of them do.

⁴ I use the term "notion" as conveniently ambiguous between terms and concepts (somewhat as "statement" is often used as conveniently ambiguous between sentence and proposition).

⁵ It is noteworthy, in this context, that particle physicists, too, distinguish between the task of recording the way a particle behaves under various experimental conditions and the task of offering an explanatory model of this behavior; interestingly, physicists refer to the former endeavor as "phenomenology." Thus, the most recent particle to be discovered, the Higgs boson, was discovered in 2012. But a "phenomenological" characterization of the phenomena warranting positing it predated the discovery significantly (see, e.g., Ellis et al. 1976). The point is that distinguishing description from explanation cannot be cast as a naïve notion of the humanities; it is essential to the conduct of inquiry in the most rigorous sectors of basic science.

⁶ For central elements of the Ramsey sentence for indignation experience, see Horgan and Timmons forthcoming.

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