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# Moral Phenomenology in Hutcheson and Hume

MICHAEL B. GILL

## I. INTRODUCTION

MORAL PHENOMENOLOGY, AS I WILL USE the term in this paper, is the study of our experience of morality. It is the study of morality “as experienced from the first-person point of view,”<sup>1</sup> the study of the “what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experiences,”<sup>2</sup> the study of introspectively accessible features that can be discerned by “a direct examination of the data of men’s moral consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

A crucial part of moral phenomenology is the study of what it is like to make a moral judgment. This part of moral phenomenology seeks to delineate the introspectively accessible mental features that are essentially involved in judging that an act ought or ought not to be performed, and in judging that a person is virtuous or vicious.

An adequate moral theory must account for the phenomenological facts. It must accommodate or explain in some way the introspectively accessible mental features essentially involved in our moral experience. An adequate moral theory must cohere with what it is like to make moral judgments.

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<sup>1</sup>David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2008), ed. E. N. Zalta, available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/phenomenology>. Smith helpfully distinguishes between “the discipline of phenomenology,” which “may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience or consciousness,” and the “historical movement of phenomenology,” which “is the philosophical tradition launched in the first half of the twentieth century by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, *et al.*” I use ‘phenomenology’ to refer to what Smith calls the ‘discipline’ and not the “historical movement.” Indeed, Smith points out that in “that movement, the discipline of phenomenology was prized as the proper foundation of all philosophy,” and one of the main points I will try to suggest is that it is problematic to give phenomenological claims an important foundational position in the assessment of rival moral theories—and that Hume and Hutcheson do better in arguing for moral sentimentalism when they do *not* rely on phenomenological claims as first premises.

<sup>2</sup>Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, “Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory,” *Philosophical Issues* 15 (2005): 56–77, at 58.

<sup>3</sup>Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1955), 30.

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It has been common for philosophers to claim that their moral theories are superior to others because their moral theories better account for our experience of moral judgment. In sections 2 and 3 of this paper, I will show how Francis Hutcheson and David Hume used phenomenological claims of this sort to argue that their sentimentalist moral theories were superior to rationalist and egoist rivals.

But Hutcheson's and Hume's phenomenological arguments do not succeed, or so I will argue in section 4. They fail to show that the phenomenology of moral judgment constitutes a strong reason for us to accept sentimentalism and reject rationalism and egoism. I think, moreover, that this failure is the typical fate of moral phenomenological arguments in general. This is because I think the introspectively accessible mental features of our moral experiences are not robust and uniform enough to constitute a strong reason to accept one moral theory and reject others. I will not be able to make that larger point here, but I hope that my exposition of Hutcheson and Hume will serve as one illustrative example of the general limitations of moral phenomenology in debates between rival moral theories.<sup>4</sup>

The failure of their phenomenological arguments should not, however, be taken to imply the failure of Hutcheson and Hume's moral sentimentalism as a whole. For Hutcheson and Hume also advance arguments that do not rely on robust phenomenological claims.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as I will try to show in section 5, there are aspects of their sentimentalism (particularly of Hume's) that not only do not rely on robust phenomenological claims, but in fact seem to evince awareness of the limitations of phenomenology in the development of an accurate account of moral judgment.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. HUTCHESON'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Hutcheson claimed that his moral sense theory was superior to the moral rationalism of Clarke and Balguy, and to the moral egoism of Hobbes and Mandeville. Hutcheson advanced many different arguments to show the superiority of his

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<sup>4</sup>For further discussion of the limitations of phenomenological arguments in moral philosophy, see Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Is Moral Phenomenology Unified?", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008): 85–97, and Michael B. Gill, "Variability and Moral Phenomenology," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2008): 99–113.

<sup>5</sup>As I will explain in section 5.1, there is at least one phenomenological claim that the sentimentalists cannot do without; namely, that we can introspectively discern, by attending only to phenomenal experience, the difference between having a positive and a negative reaction to someone's character. But that phenomenological claim is quite weak in contrast to the robust phenomenological claims I discuss in sections 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>6</sup>More generally, Hume can be taken to be developing a best explanation argument for sentimentalism. (I try to describe in detail Hume's large-scale best explanation argument in Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* [*British Moralists*] [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], chs. 17–19.) As such, the phenomenological claims I discuss in sections 2 and 3 should not be taken to be offered as sufficient reasons for sentimentalism but rather simply as parts of a much larger view, according to which a plethora of phenomena (introspectively accessible and otherwise) are all best explained by sentimentalism rather than by rationalism or egoism. What I will try to show, however, is that the phenomenological claims do not add weight to that best explanation argument. The introspectively discernable experiences of moral judgment can be explained as well by non-sentimentalist theories as by sentimentalist ones.

theory. I will not discuss all those arguments here. My goal in this section is to elucidate only the anti-egoist and anti-rationalist arguments Hutcheson made that relied on claims about the phenomenology of moral judgment.

### 2.1 *Hutcheson's Phenomenological Arguments Against Rationalism*

The rationalists held that our moral judgments are, or at least can be and should be, based in reason alone.<sup>7</sup> When we do math and logic, we are engaged in an activity that is guided entirely by our rational faculty. Similarly, according to the rationalists, when we judge that an action is morally required or forbidden, we are engaged in an activity that is, or at least can be and should be, guided entirely by our rational faculty. The rationalists argued for this view by presenting examples of moral judgments that “force our assent.” Clarke says, for instance, that it is “without dispute more *fit* and reasonable in itself, that I should *preserve the Life* of an innocent Man, that happens at any time to be in my Power; or deliver him from any imminent danger, tho’ I have never made any promise to do so; than that I should suffer him to perish, or *take away his Life*, without any reason or provocation at all.”<sup>8</sup> And Balguy says, “*It is morally fit that Man reverence his Maker*, is a Proposition self-evident to all that rightly understand the Terms. . . . [It is] as manifest, as the Relation of *Equality* between *twice Three and Six*.”<sup>9</sup> According to the rationalists, we will all immediately agree not merely that moral judgments such as these are true, but also that, like basic principles of math and logic, they are self-evident, indubitable, and *necessarily* true. But we can come to realize that something is necessarily true only through the use of our rational faculty alone. Our non-rational or empirically-based faculties can inform us only of contingent truths. So, according to the rationalists, our understanding that it is wrong (and necessarily so) to kill a man without any reason or provocation, and that it is right (and necessarily so) to reverence our Maker must be based on our rational faculty alone.<sup>10</sup>

The rationalists maintained, moreover, that all of our moral judgments are, or at least can be and should be, based on our rational faculty alone—that reason alone can inform us not only of the general truth that it is wrong to kill a man without any reason or provocation, but also what particular action we ought to perform in any specific, morally fraught situation.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear, however, that the

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<sup>7</sup>Moral rationalism can be taken to be a metaphysical thesis (morality is constituted by reason alone) or an epistemological thesis (we discern morality through reason alone), although obviously these two can be intimately related. In this paper, I will focus only on the epistemological aspect of moral rationalism.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Clarke, *The Works*, vol. 2 (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1738), 609.

<sup>9</sup>John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness*, vol. 2 (facsimile of the 1729 edition; New York: London: Garland Publishing, 1976), 45–46.

<sup>10</sup>The sentimentalists focused on our judgments of other persons’ characters; the rationalists focused on our judgments about how one is oneself obligated to act. As a result, it could be that their positions on moral phenomenology did not conflict as much as it appears—that the rationalists got the phenomenology of first-person judgments of what to do right, and that sentimentalists got the phenomenology of third-person judgments of others’ character right. I discuss this possibility in Gill, “Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism,” *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2006): 16–30.

<sup>11</sup>The rationalists can allow that we have to discern all sorts of non-moral facts about a situation in order to form a moral judgment, and that the relevant non-moral facts may include facts about

indubitability of the judgment that it is wrong to kill a man without any reason or provocation can establish that reason alone can tell us what is right and wrong in every specific, morally fraught situation. Indeed, one of the most trenchant criticisms of the early modern British moral rationalists is that their highly-touted examples of necessary moral judgments are purely rational only because they are analytic or tautological, while the substantive moral judgments we are called upon to make in specific situations are non-necessary and incapable of being founded on reason alone.<sup>12</sup> But that criticism of moral rationalism is not our topic in this section (we will return to it briefly in section 5). Our topic is the sentimentalist criticism that what it is like to make a moral judgment is phenomenologically distinct from any purely rational activity.

Hutcheson lays the groundwork for this anti-rationalist phenomenological criticism at the beginning of his *Essay on the Passions*, when he maintains that our moral ideas are based on a moral sense. Hutcheson does not intend to draw merely a weak, metaphorical comparison between the source of our moral ideas and our senses of sight, hearing, and taste. He means to claim, rather, that the source of our moral ideas is literally a sense. And, crucially for our purposes, Hutcheson's basis for this claim is that our "*Moral Perceptions*" have introspectively accessible features that are also distinctive of our visual, auditory, and gustatory impressions. According to Hutcheson, sensory impressions have two essential, introspectively accessible features: they are pleasurable or painful, and they arise in us "independently of our Will."<sup>13</sup> But when we pay "distinct *Attention* to what we are *conscious* happens in our Minds" when we have moral perceptions—when we introspect on what it is like to have a moral experience—we will realize that these two features characterize our moral perceptions as well.<sup>14</sup> As Hutcheson says, "Would Men reflect upon what they feel in themselves, all *Proofs* [of a moral sense] would be needless."<sup>15</sup>

So Hutcheson maintains that through introspection we will come to realize that positive moral judgments essentially involve a phenomenally occurrent pleasure, and that negative moral judgments essentially involve a phenomenally occurrent pain. But purely rational operations of the mind do not have these features. Let us call this anti-rationalist point *the occurrent phenomenal presence claim*.

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persons' emotions. But the non-moral facts that are relevant will be gathered by *a posteriori* reason, and the distinctively moral content will be supplied by *a priori* reason.

<sup>12</sup>See Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* [Essay], ed. A. Garrett (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 229, 228–30, 272–73, and David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [Treatise], ed. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.1.1.17–26. (The *Treatise* is cited, in the customary way, by book, section, part, and paragraph number.)

<sup>13</sup>Essay 17. I do not mean to imply that Hutcheson or Hume thought that introspection of the sort I discuss here is necessary for the making of a moral judgment. This sort of introspection is part of the basically Lockean procedure Hutcheson and Hume use to develop a philosophical account of moral judgment, as well as many other mental phenomena. Hutcheson and Hume thought that such introspection on what it is like to make a moral judgment would produce data that sentimentalism could explain better than either rationalism or egoism. But in ordinary life, we simply have the experiences and make the moral judgments, without necessarily introspecting (as a philosopher might do) on what it is like to make the judgment.

<sup>14</sup>Essay 15. See also Essay 17, and Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* [Inquiry], ed. W. Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), 85.

<sup>15</sup>Essay 5.

Hutcheson uses the occurrent phenomenal presence claim in his *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*. He says there that our “moral Ideas” are like our “Feelings or Sensations” of color, taste, and sound in that they give rise to “Pleasure and Pain.”<sup>16</sup> This is in contrast to “Reasoning or *Intellect*,” which “seems to raise no new Species of Ideas” (where ‘Ideas’ is meant in a broad Lockean sense that includes perceptions and sensations).<sup>17</sup> Hutcheson writes, “[W]hen we *approve* a kind beneficent Action, let us consider whether this *Feeling*, or *Action*, or *Modification* of the Soul more resembles an Act of *Contemplation* [of a geometric proposition] or that *Liking* we have to a beautiful Form, an harmonious Composition, a grateful Sound.”<sup>18</sup> Hutcheson does not bother to answer this question. He means it to be rhetorical. He thinks it will be obvious to everyone that her moral approvals “more resemble” what she experiences when she “likes” something than what she experiences when she completes a geometrical proof.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 Hutcheson’s Phenomenological Arguments Against Egoism

The egoists—at least as Hutcheson construed them—held that all of our actions and value judgments are ultimately based on ideas of self-interest. The notion that all of our actions are ultimately based on ideas of self-interest is probably clear enough, but the notion that all of our value judgments are based on ideas of self-interest might require a bit more explanation. According to this egoist view, whenever I make a positive judgment about someone it is because I believe her actions have benefited or will benefit me, and whenever I make a negative judgment about someone it is because I believe her actions have harmed or will harm me. This egoist view thus equates the conduct of others that I judge to be virtuous and the conduct of others that I believe will promote my own interests. According to this view, everything I do is ultimately based on my concern for my own happiness, and the activity of passing moral judgment on others is no exception.

Phenomenological claims are at the center of Hutcheson’s attack on this egoist view of moral judgment. Indeed, the first sentence of section 1 of the *Inquiry Concerning Morals*, which is essentially an anti-egoist tract, reads, “That the Perceptions of moral Good and Evil, are perfectly different from those of natural Good, or Advantage, every one must convince himself, by reflecting upon the different Manner in which he finds himself affected when these Objects occur to him.”<sup>20</sup> Through introspection, Hutcheson says here, each of us can come to see that what it is like to morally approve of something is different from what it is like to appreciate or desire a thing because it promotes one’s own interests. The way we are “affected” when we judge that something is morally good is introspectively

<sup>16</sup> *Essay* 215.

<sup>17</sup> *Essay* 215.

<sup>18</sup> *Essay* 216.

<sup>19</sup> Hutcheson does acknowledge that we may get a “sort of Pleasure” out of discovering some new truth. But that pleasure only “attends” the discovery of truth and is not essential to the operation of reason itself. Moreover, the “Pleasure which arises upon Discovery of Truth” cannot be the source of our moral distinctions, as demonstrated by the fact that we may feel that pleasure upon discovering that “certain Actions are detrimental to Society,” while our moral judgment of such actions will be negative and thus based on a feeling of pain (*Inquiry* 215–16).

<sup>20</sup> *Essay* 89.

distinct from the way we are “affected” when we judge that something is (or would be, if we possessed it) advantageous to us. Let us call this anti-egoist point the *phenomenal distinctiveness claim*.

Hutcheson doubts that everything we morally approve of advances our own interests. He argues, however, that even if that point were granted—even if we were to allow, for the sake of the argument, that everything of which we morally approve does advance our own interests—the egoist account of moral judgment would still fail because it could not explain the difference between the “love and esteem” that grounds our judgment that someone is virtuous and the “desire of possession” that grounds our judgment that someone’s actions have advanced our own interests. As Hutcheson puts it, “We are all then conscious of the Difference between that Love and Esteem, or Perception of moral Excellence, which Benevolence excites toward the Person in whom we observe it, and that Opinion of natural Goodness, which only raises Desire of Possession toward the good Object.”<sup>21</sup>

Hutcheson also argues for the phenomenal distinctiveness claim by pointing out that our reaction to harm differs depending on the harm’s cause. Consider how you would feel if a “Tempest” caused property damage that cost you a thousand dollars to repair. Now consider how you would you feel if a business partner cheated you out of a thousand dollars. We all realize that we would be “very differently affected on these Occasions, tho there may be equal natural Evil in Both.”<sup>22</sup> There is an introspectively accessible, qualitative difference between our reactions to the two events. The latter has a distinctively moral feel that the former does not. But this phenomenological difference is something the egoist account of moral judgment cannot accommodate.

Phenomenological claims are, as well, at the center of Hutcheson’s arguments against Bernard Mandeville, who was the egoist he was particularly concerned to refute in the *Inquiry*. Mandeville had held that people pass positive judgments on publicly-beneficial actions because they have been manipulated by “cunning governors” into believing that such actions redound to their personal benefit.<sup>23</sup> In response, Hutcheson argues that Mandeville’s explanation of the origin of our moral judgments fails because it cannot accommodate what it is like to experience moral approval. According to Hutcheson, the experience of moral approval is unlike any other passion, and this reveals that moral approvals, like color sensations, are caused by their own unique sense. If we did not have this unique moral sense, moreover, there would be no way anyone else could ever manipulate us into experiencing these distinctively moral perceptions.

[W]e have some other amiable Idea of Actions than that of Advantageous to our selves. . . . [T]his Perception of moral Good is not deriv’d from Custom, Education, Example, or Study. These give us no new Ideas: They might make us see Advantage to our selves in Actions whose Usefulness did not at first appear; or give us Opinions of some Tendency of actions to our Detriment, by some nice Deductions of Reason, or by a rash Prejudice, when upon the first View of the action we should have observ’d no such thing; but they never could have made us apprehend Actions as amiable or odious, without any Consideration of our own Advantage. (*Inquiry* 99)

<sup>21</sup> *Essay* 90.

<sup>22</sup> *Essay* 90–91.

<sup>23</sup> *Inquiry* 98.

Politicians—by altering our opinions of the consequences of actions—can manipulate us into thinking that something is to our advantage even if we had previously had no such thought. Similarly, custom, education, example, or study can make us feel disapproval toward something about which we used to be indifferent. But neither politicians nor custom can produce in us an experience with a new and distinct qualitative character. Neither politicians nor custom can give us “new ideas.” How we feel about things can be manipulated, but it is as impossible to manipulate us into experiencing a new kind of feeling—a feeling with a unique qualitative character—as it is to manipulate a blind person into experiencing color. Therefore, because our moral distinctions do involve feelings with a unique qualitative character, we must conclude that our moral distinctions have not been created by politicians or by custom.

### 3. HUME’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

The moral sentimentalism of Hume’s *Treatise* differs in significant ways from Hutcheson’s moral sense theory. But some of the reasons Hume offers for sentimentalism are clear echoes of those found in Hutcheson. Particularly similar to Hutcheson are Hume’s phenomenologically-based arguments against rationalism and egoism. I will describe those arguments in section 3.1. In section 3.2, I will show that throughout much of Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume held to a phenomenological view of the passions

#### 3.1 *Hume’s Phenomenological Arguments Against Rationalism and Egoism*

In “Moral Distinctions deriv’d from a Moral Sense,” Hume relies on phenomenological claims that are very similar to those we have just seen in Hutcheson.<sup>24</sup> In arguing against the rationalists, Hutcheson maintained that essential to moral judgment is a pleasurable sensation that cannot be assimilated to the exercise of reason alone: we called this the occurrent phenomenal presence claim. And Hume makes the same point when he writes,

[T]he distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but *particular* pains or pleasures. . . . An action, sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. . . . To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration. . . . We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. (*Treatise* 3.1.2.3)

According to Hume in this passage, to think something virtuous is to have a pleasurable sensation toward it, and to think something vicious is to have a painful sensation toward it. And this feature of our moral phenomenology gives us a powerful reason to accept the sentimentalist claim that our moral distinctions originate in sentiment and not in reason alone.

<sup>24</sup>*Treatise* 3.1.2.

In the next paragraph of this section of the *Treatise*, Hume relies on phenomenological claims very similar to those Hutcheson used to attack the egoists. Hutcheson argued that the pleasure we feel when we think that something is virtuous has a different qualitative character from the pleasure we feel when we think that something has promoted our own interests: we called this the phenomenal distinctiveness claim. Hume also contends that the pleasure that is constitutive of moral praise has its own distinctive qualitative character. In the passage quoted in the preceding paragraph, he says that the moral pleasure is “of a particular kind” and that we judge something virtuous when it pleases in “a particular manner” or gives “a certain satisfaction.”<sup>25</sup> Hume goes on to say,

[T]is evident, that under the term *pleasure*, we comprehend sensations, which are very different from each other, and which have only such a distinct resemblance, as is requisite to make them be express'd by the same abstract term. A good composition of music and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure; and what is more, their goodness is determin'd merely by the pleasure. But shall we say upon that account, that the wine is harmonious, or the music of a good flavour? In like manner an inanimate object, and the character or sentiments of any person may, both of them, give satisfaction; but as the satisfaction is different, this keeps our sentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us ascribe virtue to the one, and not to the other. Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that *peculiar* kind, which makes us praise or condemn. (*Treatise* 3.1.2.4)

There is an introspectively accessible difference between the pleasure a good composition of music produces and the pleasure a good bottle of wine produces. Similarly, Hume argues here, there is an introspectively accessible difference between the pleasure contemplation of a virtuous person gives rise to and the pleasure contemplation of an inanimate object or of a person who has benefited me gives rise to.

Hume also echoes the phenomenological claim Hutcheson used specifically against Mandeville. Hutcheson maintained that while politicians can manipulate us into feeling approval toward one thing or another, their manipulations could not have been the origin of moral approval itself, because moral approval has a distinctive qualitative feel. And Hume makes the same point when, in an attack on Mandeville, he writes,

Any artifice of politicians may assist nature in the producing of those sentiments, which she suggests to us, and may even on some occasions, produce alone an approbation or esteem for any particular action; but 'tis impossible it shou'd be the sole cause of the distinction we make betwixt vice and virtue. For if nature did not aid us in this particular, 'twou'd be in vain for politicians to talk of *honourable* or *dishonourable*, *praiseworthy* or *blameable*. These words wou'd be perfectly unintelligible, and wou'd no more have any idea annex'd to them, than if they were of a tongue perfectly unknown to us. The utmost politicians can perform, is, to extend the natural sentiments beyond their original bounds; but still nature must furnish the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions. (*Treatise* 3.2.2.25)

The words we use when we are trying to get across the idea that someone is virtuous—e.g., ‘honorable’ and ‘praiseworthy’—are different from the words we

<sup>25</sup>*Treatise* 3.1.2.3 and 3.1.2.11.

use when we are trying to get across the idea that someone has benefited us. And, according to Hume in this passage, it makes sense to use these different words because ‘honorable’ and ‘praiseworthy’ are connected in our minds to certain impressions, and because those impressions differ from the impressions to which the words of self-interest are connected. In what way do the moral impressions differ from the non-moral ones? They differ in that they have a distinctive qualitative character. And it is because they have a distinctive qualitative character that we must conclude that they have been furnished by nature and not created by politicians.

### 3.2 *Hume’s Phenomenological View of the Passions*

That Hume uses phenomenological claims against the rationalists and egoists should not surprise us, given that his general theory of mind involves a robustly phenomenological conception of the passions. Passions, as Hume conceives of them in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, are not dispositions or explanatory posits but rather experiences with distinctive phenomenal content.

Hume begins the *Treatise* by telling us that he will be investigating “the perceptions of the human mind.” And perceptions, as Hume understands them, “strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought and consciousness.”<sup>26</sup> Humean perceptions are such that we can be consciously aware of them. They are introspectively accessible. And moral judgments are just as rightly thought of as perceptions as anything else that is “present to the mind.”<sup>27</sup> The term ‘perception’, Hume writes, “is no less applicable to those judgments, by which we distinguish moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind. To approve of one character, to condemn another, are only so many different perceptions.”<sup>28</sup>

The perceptions that Hume thinks morals originate in are passions. Hume begins his examination of the passions in Book 2 by making it clear that passions are perceptions<sup>29</sup> and by saying that, as the passions are “simple and uniform . . . ’tis impossible we can ever, by a multitude of words, give a just definition of them.”<sup>30</sup> The point here, I think, is that when Hume is talking about a passion, he takes himself to be talking about a feeling that is nothing other than an experience with a distinctive character—something we can identify only by adverting to what it is like for us to be in that mental state. Hume goes on, of course, to provide rich causal psychological explanations of these passions. He explains what causes us to have the feelings we do. But he will not and cannot do much in the way of defining or analyzing the passions themselves, and that is because he takes the passions themselves to be nothing but a certain kind of experience.

So it seems that, according to Hume’s programmatic statements at the beginnings of Books 1, 2, and 3, an unfeared passion—such as a dispositional account of desires would countenance<sup>31</sup>—is a contradiction in terms. According to these

<sup>26</sup>*Treatise* 1.1.1.1.

<sup>27</sup>*Treatise* 3.1.1.2.

<sup>28</sup>*Treatise* 3.1.1.2.

<sup>29</sup>*Treatise* 2.1.1.

<sup>30</sup>*Treatise* 2.1.2.1.

<sup>31</sup>Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), develops a dispositional account of desires in what he calls a “Humean theory of motivation.”

statements, what passions are are experiences with a certain phenomenal character.<sup>32</sup>

There are, moreover, plenty of passages throughout Book 2 in which Hume seems to be consciously relying on this phenomenological view of passions. He says, for instance, that the perceptions of the mind he is studying (unlike the objects studied by “natural philosophy”) are “perfectly known,”<sup>33</sup> which indicates that he takes the passions to be necessarily introspectively accessible. He also says that “the *will*” should be studied along with the passions insofar as he means by the term “nothing but *the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind.*”<sup>34</sup>

Another indication that Hume conceives of the passions in a phenomenological fashion is his account of the connection between love and the “desire of the happiness of the person below’d.”<sup>35</sup> If one were in the non-phenomenological business of giving a conceptual or dispositional analysis of love—as opposed to simply explaining the causes of an occurrent feeling—one would, I presume, build into love some kind of concern for the happiness of the beloved. But Hume explicitly denies that the thing he is talking about when he is talking about love essentially includes concern for the happiness of the beloved:

[T]ho’ ’tis certain we never love any person without desiring his happiness, nor hate any without wishing his misery, yet these desires arise only upon the ideas of the happiness or misery of our friend or enemy being presented by the imagination, and are not absolutely essential to love and hatred. . . . [B]enevolence and anger are passions different from love and hatred, and only conjoin’d with them, by the original constitution of the mind. . . . This order of things, abstractedly consider’d, is not necessary. Love and hatred might have been unattended with any such desires, or their particular connexion might have been entirely revers’d. If nature had so pleas’d, love might have had the same effect as hatred, and hatred as love. I see no contradiction in supposing a desire to producing misery annex’d to love, and of happiness to hatred. (*Treatise* 2.2.6.5–6)

So Hume allows the possibility of love always being conjoined with a desire to produce misery in the beloved. But such a possibility seems plausible only if we take ‘love’ to refer to a bare feeling, to an experience with a certain what-it-is-likeness.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup>But see Persson, who suggests that Hume was groping towards (even if he never fully realized) a dispositional account according to which desires are “unfelt states that cause behavior” (Ingmar Persson, “Hume—Not a ‘Humean’ about Motivation” [“Not a ‘Humean’”], *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14 [1997]: 189–208, at 198).

<sup>33</sup>*Treatise* 2.2.6.2.

<sup>34</sup>*Treatise* 2.3.1.2.

<sup>35</sup>*Treatise* 2.2.6.3.

<sup>36</sup>Owen maintains that a Humean passion “is bound in a relational nexus of a double relation of impressions and ideas, and cannot be understood independently of that context” (David Owen, “Hume and the Mechanics of the Mind: Impressions, Ideas and Association,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hume’s Treatise*, ed D. F. Norton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming]). A similar point is made by Persson, “Not a ‘Humean,’” 196. It seems to me, however, that Hume takes love to be a certain kind of feeling, and that he would therefore hold that we can understand what this feeling is (we can understand what we talk about when we talk about love), even if we have no clue about the double relation of impressions and ideas that caused it. The associative relations of impressions and ideas causes the feeling, but the feeling itself does not refer to or point to or implicate those causal

Hume's uses of the phrases 'very nature and essence' and 'very essence' constitute additional evidence of his phenomenological view of the passions. At numerous points in Book 2, Hume says that the "very nature and essence" or "very essence" of a passion is a pleasurable or painful sensation:

The most probable hypothesis, which has been advanced to explain the distinction betwixt vice and virtue, and the origin of moral rights and obligations, is, that from a primary constitution of nature, certain characters and passions, by the very view and contemplation, produce a pain, and others in like manner excite a pleasure. The uneasiness and satisfaction are not only inseparable from vice and virtue, but constitute their very nature and essence. (*Treatise* 2.1.7.5)

No one has ever been able to tell what *wit* is, and to shew why such a system of thought must be received under that denomination, and such another rejected. It is only by taste we can decide concerning it, nor are we possessed of any other standard upon which we can form a judgment of this kind. Now, what is this *taste*, from which true and false wit in a manner receive their being, and without which no thought can have a title to either of these denominations? It is plainly nothing but a sensation of pleasure from true wit, and of uneasiness from false, without our being able to tell the reasons of that pleasure or uneasiness. The power of bestowing these opposite sensations is, therefore, the very essence of true and false wit, and consequently the cause of that pride or humility which arises from them. (*Treatise* 2.1.7.7)

If we consider all the hypotheses which have been formed either by philosophy or common reason, to explain the difference betwixt beauty and deformity, we shall find that all of them resolve into this, that beauty is such an order and construction of parts, as, either by the *primary constitution* of our nature, by *custom*, or by *caprice*, is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. This is the distinguishing character of beauty, and forms all the difference betwixt it and deformity, whose natural tendency is to produce uneasiness. Pleasure and pain, therefore, are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence. (*Treatise* 2.1.8.2)

Pleasurable and painful sensations are essential to Humean passions. Pleasurable and painful sensations are felt experiences. So felt experiences must be essential to Humean passions. Indeed, Hume's uses of 'very nature and essence' and 'very essence' suggest not merely that pleasurable and painful sensations are essential to the passions, but also that the essence of each passion is a pleasure or pain with its own particular, unique qualitative feel. For pride, virtue, and beauty are all distinct from each other. So if pleasurable sensation is the very essence of pride, virtue, and beauty, then in order for each of these three to be distinguishable from the other two, the pleasurable sensation that is the essence of each must be qualitatively distinguishable from the pleasurable sensations that are the essences of the other two. And the qualitative distinctiveness of each of these passions is just what Hume is contending for when he says that the sensation that is the essence of each passion is "peculiar" to it. He is not saying that the essence of each passion is to cause pleasure in general, where 'pleasure' is a mass noun that does not

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origins. At the same time, it is certainly the case that sometimes (probably most of the time) when we talk about love, we (unlike Hume at *Treatise* 2.2.6.5–6) are talking about something that is not merely a particular type of feeling, and that therefore "cannot be understood independently" of the context of caring about the happiness of the beloved.

involve a differentiation between types of pleasure. He is saying that the essence of each passion is *a pleasure*—where ‘pleasure’ is a count noun—of a particular phenomenological type. There is “*a pleasant sensation*,” “*a peculiar impression or emotion*,” that is the very essence of Humean pride; there is “*a pleasure*” that is the very essence of Humean virtue; there is “*a pleasure and satisfaction*” that is the very essence of Humean beauty.<sup>37</sup> When Hume says in *Treatise* 3.1.2.3 that “to have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind,” he intends to make the same point he used the phrase ‘very essence’ to make in Book 2: he intends to claim that our judgments of virtue are based on a sentiment with a particular, unique qualitative feel. This is just the claim of phenomenal distinctiveness, which, as we seen, both Hume and Hutcheson use to argue against the egoists.

A phenomenological reading of the passions also explains well some of the crucial claims about the motivational inertness of reason that Hume makes in *Treatise* 2.3.3 and on which he explicitly relies when arguing against moral rationalism in *Treatise* 3.1.1. Hume thinks one of the most compelling reasons for the view that reason alone cannot oppose the motivational force of a passion is that reason tells us whether a perception is an accurate representation, while passions are “original existences” that are not in the business of representing anything. A passion “contains not any representative quality. . . . When I am angry, I am actually possess with the passion, and in that emotion have no more a reference to any other object, than when I am thirsty, or sick, or more than five foot high.”<sup>38</sup> Some commentators have found this passage puzzling because so much of Book 2 consists of an account of the role played by ideas—which are representative—in the development of the passions. If passions are built on ideas, and if ideas have a “representative quality,” how can passions completely lack representative quality?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Norton takes a different view when he writes: “Taken in isolation these remarks about the essence of virtue, beauty, and wit may suggest Hume thinks that virtue and beauty are nothing more than a certain kind of feeling. . . . If we look carefully at Hume’s other claims, we will see that this is not what he means. In the first place, a claim that virtue and beauty are identical with pleasure, or just are pleasure and nothing more, would appear to commit Hume to the view that virtue and beauty are indistinguishable from one another. But we can readily see that this is not his view. . . . Given, then, that virtue and beauty are not identical with each other, it follows that they cannot be identical to that particular kind of feeling which they are both said to cause. . . . [T]he view we should attribute to Hume is that the experience of certain kinds of feeling of pleasure and pain is a *necessary* (but not a *sufficient*) condition of the experience of pride or humility” (editor’s “Introductory Material” in Hume, *Treatise* 153). When we take Hume to have a robustly phenomenological conception of the passions, however, we do not need to attribute to him the view that producing pleasure is only necessary (and not sufficient) for pride, virtue, and beauty—a view that really does not cohere well at all with his ‘very essence’ and ‘very nature and essence’ terminology. What distinguishes pride, virtue, and beauty from each other, on this robustly phenomenological reading, is the peculiar qualitative feel of each of the pleasures involved. It may be that a view that takes the production of pleasure to be only necessary for the passions is more plausible on its own (non-exegetical) merits. And indeed, in section 5.1, I maintain that Hume’s account of the general point of view suggests this other, more weakly phenomenological view. But I think a close reading of Book 2 shows that there Hume did take a robustly phenomenological view of the passions (i.e., a view according to which passions are identified with feelings that have distinctive phenomenal feels).

<sup>38</sup>*Treatise* 2.3.3.5.

<sup>39</sup>Baier, for instance, contends that we should disregard Hume’s statements in *Treatise* 2.3.3.5 because they fail to cohere with the rest of Book 2 of the *Treatise* (Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*:

This question is easily answered, however, by a phenomenological reading of the passions. On this reading, when talking about the passion of, say, anger, Hume means to refer, narrowly, to the distinctive feeling that can be characterized only in terms of what it is like to be in it. He means to say that the experience of the feeling by itself is distinct from any representative perceptions (beliefs) one may also have. Representative perceptions may play a role in causing me to experience that feeling. My anger towards someone will be caused in part by my belief that he has done something that I take to be insulting or injurious. But that belief of mine can be distinguished from the feeling nonetheless—just as the feeling of love can be distinguished from the desire of the happiness of the beloved, and as every Humean effect can be distinguished from its cause. Indeed, when I am experiencing the feeling of anger, I may not even be consciously aware of the belief that has caused it. I may feel anger towards someone without, at that moment, being aware of why. I may experience a feeling of fear, or a burst of pride, without, at that very moment, having any clear idea of what exactly I am fearful or proud of. Or at least such experiences are possible when we take passions, as Hume does, to be—essentially, entirely—occurrent, introspectively accessible feelings.

It might seem, however, that in the very section discussed in the previous paragraph—*Treatise* 2.3.3—Hume develops a view that implies a distinctly non-phenomenological view of the passions. What I have in mind is Hume's account of the calm passions.<sup>40</sup> Here is the relevant passage:

It is natural for one, that does not examine objects with a strict philosophic eye, to imagine, that those actions of the mind are entirely the same, which produce not a different sensation, and are not immediately distinguishable to the feeling and perception. Reason, for instance, exerts itself without producing any sensible emotions; and except in the more sublime disquisitions of philosophy, or in the frivolous subtilities of the schools, scarce ever conveys any pleasure or uneasiness. Hence it proceeds, that every action of the mind which operates with the same calmness and tranquility, is confounded with reason by all those who judge of things from the first view and appearance. Now it is certain there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, though they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds; either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, considered merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are supposed to proceed from the same faculty with that which judges of truth and falsehood. Their nature and principles have been supposed the same, because their sensations are not evidently different. (*Treatise* 2.3.3.8)

If one were trying to argue against a phenomenological reading of Hume on the passions, one might claim that here Hume is saying that there is no introspectively accessible difference between the experience of a calm passion and a purely rational operation of the mind. On this reading, neither calm passion nor reason neces-

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*Reflections on Hume's Treatise [Progress]* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991], 159–64). My point is that those statements cohere very well once we realize how phenomenological Hume's view of the passions was.

<sup>40</sup>Persson, "Not a 'Humean'," presents a reading of the calm passions passages that suggests a non-phenomenological view.

sarily produces any sensible mental motion, and thus introspection alone cannot discern the difference between them. This reading is anti-phenomenological in that it implies that, since there is no introspectively accessible difference between calm passion and reason, phenomenological investigation is incapable on its own of helping us determine whether a judgment of ours originates in calm passion or in reason. That we sometimes feel no pleasure when we make a judgment—that some judgments “cause no disorder in the soul” and “are not evidently different” from, and in fact have the same “calmness and tranquility” as purely rational mental operations—would be consistent both with the claim that the judgment originates in reason alone and with the claim that the judgment originates in sentiment (where the sentiment in question is taken to be a calm passion). Indeed, on this reading, the calm passion passage can be read as a criticism of those who would try to use phenomenology to address the question separating rationalists and sentimentalists. Such a use of phenomenology, according to this reading, would be pursued only by “those who judge of things from the first view and appearance” instead of with a “strict philosophical eye.”

I believe, however, that a phenomenological reading of the calm passions passage is at least as natural as the anti-phenomenological reading, and that it fits much better with the view of the passions we have found in the rest of Book 2. According to the phenomenological reading, Hume is saying that there is an introspectively accessible difference between the experience of a calm passion and a purely rational operation of the mind. It is just that the difference is subtle—subtle enough that a person can notice it only if he introspects with “a strict philosophic eye.” In support of the phenomenological reading, we can point out that Hume says that reason and the calm passions “are not *immediately* distinguishable,” and that people cannot distinguish the two actions of the mind if they “judge of things from the *first* view and appearance,” both of which comments can be read as holding that the two things will eventually be introspectively distinguishable to the person who pays careful attention. We can also point out that Hume says that the calm passions “produce *little* emotion in the mind, and are *more* known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation,” both of which comments can be read as holding that the calm passions do produce *some* emotion in the mind and can be known *to at least some degree* by their immediate feeling or sensation. The use of the phrase “some *emotion*” is salient here, as in the eighteenth century, ‘emotion’ meant “a moving, stirring, agitation, perturbation (in physical sense),” which is something that would certainly seem to have some occurrent phenomenal presence.<sup>41</sup> It seems unlikely that an *emotion*, in eighteenth-century parlance, would completely lack introspectively accessible character.

#### 4. THE FAILURE OF HUTCHESON AND HUME’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Let us return now to the main phenomenological claims Hutcheson and Hume use to argue for their moral sentimentalism. There is the anti-rationalist claim of occurrent phenomenal presence: that the experience of judging that someone

<sup>41</sup>See Baier, *Progress* 164, 310.

is virtuous essentially involves an occurrent, introspectively accessible pleasure that distinguishes that experience from any purely rational activity. And there is the anti-egoist claim of phenomenal distinctiveness: that the pleasure of judging that someone is virtuous is qualitatively distinct from the pleasure of judging that someone has advanced our own interests. When set against the positions of their rationalist and egoist opponents, both of these claims can seem initially attractive. Both of these claims, however, are ultimately unable to support the argumentative weight they are designed to bear.

#### 4.1 *The Anti-Rationalist Claim of Occurrent Phenomenal Presence*

Here is why the anti-rationalist claim of occurrent phenomenal presence may initially seem attractive. When we bring to mind a paradigmatic instance of judging that a person is virtuous, the experience of a positive feeling towards the person will typically be part of the picture. And the positive feeling that is part of the picture will have a warmth—a force and vivacity—that will not be present when we bring to mind a paradigmatic instance of coming to a purely rational conclusion. Imagine, for instance, an isolated case of witnessing someone performing a clearly virtuous act—unadulterated kindness, say, or great heroism. Now imagine an isolated case of engaging in some purely rational activity—adding together two numbers, for instance. It seems very plausible that the first imagining will involve the idea of a positive feeling while the second imagining will not.

But this phenomenological claim fails to undermine moral rationalism. For it does not establish that every experience of making a positive moral judgment involves an occurrent, phenomenologically accessible pleasure. It seems just as plausible that sometimes we judge that someone is virtuous while experiencing no particular feeling toward her at all; and that we may at times even judge (albeit grudgingly) that someone is virtuous when all of our occurrent feelings toward her are unpleasant or painful. Maybe it is uncontroversial that we *often* feel pleasure towards those we judge virtuous. But its *often* being the case that we feel pleasure towards those we judge virtuous is not sufficient for Hutcheson's and Hume's phenomenological argument to work against the rationalists. For we may often feel pleasure upon concluding that a mathematical theorem is true. But of course we can still distinguish the judgment that the theorem is true from the pleasure that attends it. And if we sometimes judge that a person is virtuous without feeling occurrent pleasure toward him or her, then it would seem that it is possible—or at least that there is nothing in our introspectively accessible, phenomenological experience alone that rules out the possibility—that we can distinguish the judgment from the often-but-not-always attendant pleasure in the moral case, as well.

The possibility that we can judge someone virtuous without experiencing a positive feeling toward her does not prove that there is no necessary connection at all between judgments of virtue and positive feelings. Perhaps judging someone virtuous is necessarily connected in one way or another to the disposition to experience positive feelings under certain conditions (which conditions may fail to hold when we make some of our moral judgments). The possibility that we can judge someone virtuous without experiencing a positive feeling toward her does

establish, however, that there is no necessary connection between judging that someone is virtuous and the occurrent experience of an introspectively accessible positive feeling. And it is just that second kind of necessary connection (between moral judgment and an occurrent feeling) that is required in order for the claim of occurrent phenomenal presence to work against the rationalists.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.2 *The Anti-Egoist Claim of Phenomenal Distinctiveness*

Here is why the anti-egoist claim of phenomenal distinctiveness is initially attractive. We make positive value judgments about many different kinds of things—useful inanimate objects, works of art, natural beauty, people who advance our own interests, people who are virtuous, etc. The egoists claimed that all of these judgments are actually at base the same thing: a positive reaction to something that we think advances our own interests. But this claim flies in the face of common sense. It seems apparent that what we are doing when we judge that someone has advanced our own interests is different from what we are doing when we judge that something is beautiful or that someone is virtuous. Now, one way to vindicate this aspect of common sense and refute the egoists is to show that there are some people we judge to be virtuous who we do not think have advanced our own interests. And there are plenty of anti-egoist arguments of that type in the works of the moral sentimentalists (particularly in Hutcheson).<sup>43</sup> But that type of argument may not seem to illuminate the entirety of what is wrong with the egoist claim. For that type of argument relies on contingent facts about our judgments. It asks us to examine what we make favorable judgments about, and then to compare one set of objects of favorable judgment (the set of what we judge to advance our own interests) to another set (the set of what we judge to be virtuous). But powerful as that type of argument may be, it does not seem to capture all of the difference between the kinds of favorable judgments that we make. It does not seem to capture the *intrinsic* difference that exists between judgments of what will advance our own interests and judgments of what is virtuous, a difference that we can be immediately aware of without having to undertake the detached, observational task of comparing the set of objects of one kind of judgment to the set of objects of the other kind of judgment. Phenomenology, on the other hand, does seem to capture this intrinsic, immediate difference. The experience of judging that someone is virtuous can seem to be clearly, introspectively distinct from the experience of judging that someone has advanced our own interests.

Nonetheless, this phenomenological claim fails to undermine egoism. For it is unclear that our sentimental responses to self-advantage, beauty, and virtue have the features of phenomenal distinctiveness that the argument based on this claim requires. It is not unreasonable to deny that every time I judge that some-

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<sup>42</sup>I am here criticizing only the view that every moral judgment is attended by an occurrent feeling. But note that this does not constitute a criticism of motive-internalist views more generally. For while motive-internalist views hold that there is some kind of necessary connection between a moral judgment and a motive, many of these views (indeed, most motive-internalist views in recent meta-ethics) do not require that the connection be to an *occurrent* motive or feeling. See, for example, the internalism of Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*.

<sup>43</sup>See *Inquiry* 116–33.

one is virtuous I experience one and the same positive feeling, nor to deny that that positive feeling is clearly qualitatively distinct from any other kind of positive feeling. The qualitative characters of the positive feelings I have toward different situations may be less sharply defined than that. They may not be not the sorts of things I can identify, distinguish, and group together by attending only to their introspective character.<sup>44</sup>

I readily acknowledge that there seems to be a significant intrinsic difference between judging that someone is virtuous and judging that someone has advanced my own interests. But it is not at all clear that that difference can be read off of phenomenology alone. My experiences of moral pleasure may not allow for that kind of fine-grained individuation. Whether I describe my feelings toward someone as self-interested, aesthetic, or moral may not be determined simply by the feelings' introspectively accessible qualitative character, but may rather also be determined by whether I have antecedently decided that the judgment in question is a self-interested, aesthetic, or moral one. At least some of the time, I may label a feeling 'moral' (or call it 'approval') based on a feature of the judgment it attends rather than decide that the judgment is moral because of the antecedent, introspectively accessible qualitative character of a feeling I have experienced. In this, the experience of making a moral judgment seems to differ from the experience of hearing an oboe, smelling honeysuckle, or tasting chocolate—and maybe from the experience of fear, anger, and pride, as well. The sound of an oboe, the smell of honeysuckle, and the taste of chocolate are all experiences that are sharply defined enough for me to be able to identify them based on their qualitative character alone. I can imagine experiencing, out of the blue, the sound of an oboe and saying to myself, "I wonder where the oboe is?" I think I can also imagine experiencing fear, anger, or pride and, at least initially, not having any idea what I am feeling fearful, angry, or proud about. But moral approval is not like that. Moral approval does not have a qualitative character that is uniform and robust enough for me to identify it as moral approval based on its introspectively accessible feel alone. I cannot imagine experiencing moral approval without having any idea of who or what I am approving of.

Now I admit that my questioning here of the anti-rationalist and anti-egoist phenomenological claims amounts to only a little more than a counterassertion. I am doing only a little more than suggesting that when we (I?) introspect, we find that we sometimes judge that someone is virtuous without at that moment having any positive feelings toward her, and that the positive feelings we do sometimes have when making moral judgments are not invariably of a unique qualitative character, different from what we feel when we make all other types of judgments. So what would I be able to say if someone responded by contending that when he introspects he finds that he does always experience a positive feeling toward persons he judges virtuous, and that that positive feeling does have a distinctive qualitative character? The truth is, if I am engaged only in the phenomenological

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<sup>44</sup>For a view that bolsters the phenomenological claim I am questioning here, see Stephen Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), where it is argued that our reactive attitudes (on which morality, or a large part of it, anyway, is based) can be distinguished from non-reactive attitudes by introspection.

task of describing the what-it-is-like features of concrete moral experience, there really is little more I can say. I believe I am describing my own experience accurately, and I believe your experiences are similar. But if you disagree with me about our (your?) moral experiences, there is little I can offer in support of my position so long as I restrict myself to arguments that rely only on phenomenological claims as their premises. But then again, there is also little Hutcheson or Hume can offer in support of their anti-rationalist and anti-egoist position so long as they are similarly restricted to phenomenological premises. And of course, the rationalists and egoists would have disagreed with them on just these phenomenological points. The great weakness of approaches to moral theorizing that begin from phenomenological premises is their inability to get beyond stalemates of this sort.<sup>45</sup>

##### 5. SENTIMENTALISM WITHOUT ROBUST PHENOMENOLOGICAL CLAIMS

In sections 2 and 3, I argued that Hutcheson and Hume use phenomenological arguments against their egoist and rationalist opponents; they advance argument that use as premises claims about the distinctively first-personal experience of morality. In section 4, I argued that these phenomenological arguments fail; the claims about the distinctively first-personal experiences of morality are too questionable to support the argumentative weight placed on them. I believe, however, that Hutcheson's and Hume's moral sentimentalism has a lot going for it that can be disengaged from their phenomenological arguments. They provide plenty of arguments for rejecting rationalism and egoism that do not rely on phenomenological claims as premises. The phenomenological arguments can be excised without leading their accounts to collapse.

I have already alluded to several kinds of arguments that Hutcheson and Hume make that do not depend on robust phenomenological claims. Against the rationalists, there are arguments purporting to show that reason alone is too abstract or formal to fund the particular, substantive moral judgments that we often make in daily life. Against the egoists, there are arguments purporting to show that the set of people we judge to be morally virtuous is not coextensive with the set of people we believe promote our own interests. Against both opponents, there are arguments purporting to show that sentimentalism provides a superior overall explanation of morality.

Those anti-rationalist and anti-egoist arguments are neutral on the question of the usefulness of phenomenology in the development of an account of moral judgment. They can be combined both with a robustly phenomenological approach and with an approach that eschews robust phenomenological claims. What is even more interesting for our purposes, however, are the claims the sentimentalists make that suggest an awareness of the limitations of moral phenomenology in the development of an account of moral judgment. The most important of these claims occur in Hume's discussion, in the third part of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, of the "general point of view."

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<sup>45</sup>I discuss this general problem with moral phenomenology in more depth in Gill, "Variability and Moral Phenomenology."

5.1 *Hume's General Point of View*

Hume introduces the “general point of view” when addressing an objection to the sentimentalist account of moral judgment. The sentimentalist account holds that our moral judgments about persons are based on sentiments we feel towards them. But we may make the same moral judgment about two people towards whom we have different sentiments. I may feel a very strong sentiment toward the kindness my friend shows me, while I will not feel the same strong sentiment toward a person in China who shows kindness to someone I do not know. But if my friend and the person in China perform the same kinds of action and do so for the same kinds of reasons, I will likely make the same moral judgment about both of them. So, according to the objection, my moral judgments must not be based on my sentiments because my sentiments vary in a way my judgments do not. Hume responds to this objection by contending that my moral judgments are based on—or are supposed to be based on, or are correct to the extent they are based on—not simply how I *actually* feel at the moment when I make my judgment. Rather, a correct moral judgment is one that is based on how I *would* feel if I were to consider the person’s conduct from a particular point of view. My moral judgment should be based, specifically, on how I would feel about the person if I were in her vicinity or immediate sphere of influence when she acted. We “confine our view to that narrow circle, in which any person moves, in order to form a judgment of his moral character.”<sup>46</sup> “We blame equally a bad action, which we read of in history, with one perform’d in our neighbourhood the other day: The meaning of which is, that we know from reflection, that the former action wou’d excite as strong sentiments of disapprobation as the latter, were it plac’d in the same position.”<sup>47</sup>

Hume’s discussion of the general point of view provides materials for developing a sentimentalist distinction between a moral and a non-moral reaction that does not rely on robust phenomenological claims. The general point of view allows a sentimentalist to say that a reaction of mine is moral (i.e., it is the kind of reaction on which moral judgments are based) not simply because it has a certain qualitative feel that distinguishes it from self-interest, but rather because the reaction is what I have when I consider matters from a certain point of view—i.e., when I consider a person’s character from the point of view not of how her conduct affects my own welfare, but rather from the point of view of how her conduct affects the welfare of those within her immediate sphere of influence.<sup>48</sup> The sentimentalist thus does not need to maintain the phenomenal distinctiveness claim, which says that there is some distinctive qualitative feel that characterizes all of my moral reactions and only my moral reactions. The sentimentalist is no longer committed to holding that I must be able to identify a reaction as moral based on its phenomenal feel alone. The sentimentalist can now hold that what makes a reaction moral is the point of view I am in when I have it, not just the reaction’s qualitative character. On this view, I take a reaction of mine to be moral because of

<sup>46</sup>*Treatise* 3.3.3.2.

<sup>47</sup>*Treatise* 3.3.1.18.

<sup>48</sup>I mean ‘welfare’ here to refer both to usefulness and agreeability, and ‘those within her immediate sphere of influence’ to refer both to the person herself and to the other people she comes into direct contact with.

the kinds of factors I am reacting to—namely, how a person’s conduct affects the welfare of those within the person’s immediate sphere of influence—not simply because of the what-it-is-likeness of the reaction itself. (Note that when discussing the general point of view, Hume’s terminology for describing the sentiment at the base of moral judgments becomes rather loose. He speaks of “sentiments of love and kindness” toward those we judge virtuous, rather than strictly of approval.<sup>49</sup>) So if I have a positive reaction to Alice when I consider how her conduct affects those within her immediate sphere of influence, and if I have a positive reaction to Bernard when I consider how his conduct affects those within his immediate sphere of influence, I will judge both Alice and Bernard to be virtuous even if the qualitative feel of my reaction to Alice is not the same as the qualitative feel of my reaction to Bernard. And if I have a positive reaction to Carl when I consider how his conduct affects those within his immediate sphere of influence, and I have a positive reaction to Debbie when I consider how her conduct affects only my own interests, then I can judge that Carl is virtuous and not judge that Debbie is virtuous, even if I cannot introspectively discern any qualitative difference between my reaction to Carl and my reaction to Debbie.<sup>50</sup>

Now, even with the general point of view added to their account of moral judgment, sentimentalists like Hume still have to hold that we can introspectively discern the difference between having a positive reaction and having a negative reaction to someone’s character. They still have to hold that our positive reactions feel to us different from our negative ones. Indeed, that we can discern a qualitative difference between our positive and negative reactions is the hard phenomenological core that no sentimentalist moral theory can ever do without. Essential to moral sentimentalism is the idea that a necessary ingredient in the drawing of moral distinctions is the having of reactions that can be distinguished as positive or negative in no way other than by feeling alone. But once the general point of view is on board, a sentimentalist account does not need to hold that there

<sup>49</sup>*Treatise* 3.3.1.16.

<sup>50</sup>It might seem that the claims Hume is making in the general point of view passages are already present in *Treatise* 3.1.2.4. But in that passage, it is clear that Hume is relying on the phenomenal distinctiveness claim. Hume does suggest at *Treatise* 3.1.2.4 that moral judgments are based on a sentiment we feel when we consider a person from a general point of view, but he also holds that what makes that sentiment suited to ground a moral judgment is its distinctive qualitative feel. In *Treatise* 3.3.1 and 3.3.3, in contrast, he suggests a view according to which what makes a sentiment suited to ground a moral judgment is not that it has any particular distinctive qualitative feel, but that it is the response we have when we occupy a general point of view. My view of Hume thus holds a middle ground between Don Garrett, “Replies,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 205–15, and Charlotte Brown, “Is the General Point of View the Moral Point of View?”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 197–203. Garrett holds that moral sentiments can be experienced independently of the general point of view; I hold that this captures accurately what Hume says in *Treatise* 3.1.2, when he is discussing the peculiar phenomenological content of approval, although it does not capture the parts of *Treatise* 3.3.1 or 3.3.3 in which he is discussing the general point of view. Brown holds that a sentiment is distinctly moral only if experienced from the general point of view; I hold that this captures accurately what Hume says about the general point of view in *Treatise* 3.3.1 and 3.3.3, although it does not capture his discussion of approval in *Treatise* 3.1.2. There are, moreover, independent reasons for thinking that the position in *Treatise* 3.1 is more like Hutcheson’s than the position in *Treatise* 3.2 and 3.3; see James Moore, “Hume and Hutcheson,” in *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, ed. M. A. Stewart and J. W. Wright (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 23–57, and Gill, *British Moralists*, 213.

is any phenomenologically significant difference between feelings other than the difference between being positive and being negative. That very coarse-grained valence distinction (as opposed to the fine-grained distinction the phenomenal distinctiveness claim requires) is enough.<sup>51</sup>

Let us now turn to the implications Hume's general point of view has for his disagreement with the moral rationalists. We saw that both Hutcheson and Hume argue against the rationalists on the basis of the occurrent phenomenal presence claim, according to which our positive moral judgments involve a pleasurable perception that does not characterize our purely rational activities. Does Hume's account of the general point of view completely reverse course, implying that we may sometimes make a positive moral judgment about someone towards whom we feel no introspectively accessible sentiment at all? It seems to me that Hume never clearly says such a thing. Consider the following three passages:

Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than *Marcus Brutus*, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter. We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renown'd patriot, he wou'd command a much higher degree of affections and admiration. (*Treatise* 3.3.1.16)

[The sympathy we feel toward a distant person whom we judge to be virtuous] is far from being as lively as when our own interest is concern'd, or that of our particular friends; nor has it such an influence on our love and hatred: But being equally conformable to our calm and general principles, 'tis said to have an equal authority over our reason, and to command our judgment and opinion. (*Treatise* 3.3.1.18.)

[T]ho' sympathy be much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and a sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; yet we neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning men. (*Treatise* 3.3.3.2)

In each of these passages, Hume leaves open the possibility that we feel *some* sentiment towards the distant person about whom we make a positive moral judgment. The sentiment we feel towards distant persons may be less strong, "fainter," or not "as lively" as that which we feel towards persons who are near to us. But these passages seem to hold that we nonetheless do feel *something* toward those distant persons. Hume does not seem explicitly to make the anti-phenomenological claim that moral judgments are based on sentiments that we may not (occurrently) feel at all.

But even if Hume does not explicitly make that anti-phenomenological claim, his account of the moral point of view is at least strongly suggestive of it. For Hume evinces a clear awareness that our moral judgments do not track our occurrent feelings. He says plainly that our moral judgments can—and indeed very often

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<sup>51</sup>As noted above (note 44), Darwall's view of reactive attitudes implies that the distinction between moral and non-moral attitudes is phenomenologically more fine-grained than simply the distinction between positive and negative valence. I do not think, however, that the phenomenological distinction between reactive and non-reactive attitudes supports one side or the other in the debate between sentimentalists, rationalists, and egoists—and it is a phenomenological argument for the sentimentalist side of this debate that I am concerned with here.

do—become “loosen’d” from our occurrent sentimental experience.<sup>52</sup> We form judgments based on a belief about what our experience would be under circumstances different from the circumstances we are actually in.

The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners. And tho’ the *heart* does not always take part with those general notions, or regulate its love and hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools. (*Treatise* 3.3.3.2)

Even if we do feel some “faint” sentiment toward the distant person we are making a moral judgment about, that sentiment is not what we base our judgment on. For Hume, our occurrent sentimental experience—what is going on in the “heart” at the moment when we make a moral judgment—may at times play no role in the making of a moral judgment. Such a view of moral judgment will not rely on the occurrent phenomenal presence claim to defeat moral rationalism. And such a view suggests (even if it does not directly state) a sentimentalist account of moral judgment that is built on a dispositional understanding of at least some of the passions.

Now there are two main interpretations one can take of Humean moral judgments from the general point of view.<sup>53</sup> According to one interpretation,<sup>54</sup> correct Humean moral judgments about A are those that accord with sentiments we would feel if we were to consider A’s character from the point of view of those in her more or less immediate vicinity. Of course we may actually be in A’s immediate vicinity, and then we will actually feel the sentiment in question. But if we are not in A’s immediate vicinity, then we must imagine what it would feel like if we were in A’s immediate vicinity. And so in this second case, we will not actually feel the sentiment on which our moral judgment is based, but rather will base our moral judgment on a prediction that we would feel that sentiment were we in A’s immediate vicinity—i.e., on an idea of a sentiment rather than the experience of the sentiment itself. Some have thought, however, that there is an insurmountable obstacle to interpreting Hume’s general point of view as involving merely the idea of approval rather than the experience of the sentiment itself.<sup>55</sup> The putative problem is that this interpretation cannot be brought into coherence with Hume’s motivational argument against rationalism in *Treatise* 3.1.1, as that argument (it is held) requires the presence of a sentiment, and not merely an idea, in every moral judgment. We are thus forced to another interpretation of Humean judgments from the general point of view.<sup>56</sup> According to this second interpretation, when I am not in A’s immediate vicinity but nonetheless judge that she is virtuous, I am actually feeling a sentiment of approval toward A, but the feeling is fainter than

<sup>52</sup>*Treatise* 3.3.1.18.

<sup>53</sup>For full discussion of both interpretations, see Elizabeth Radcliffe, “Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View, and the Inculcation of ‘Morality’” [“Motivating Sentiments”], *Hume Studies* 20 (1994): 37–58.

<sup>54</sup>Radcliffe finds this in Harman, Rawls, and Richards.

<sup>55</sup>See Radcliffe, “Motivating Sentiments,” and Rachel Cohon, “The Common Point of View in Hume’s Ethics,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997): 827–50.

<sup>56</sup>Radcliffe finds this interpretation in Foot, Darwall, and Mackie.

the feeling I would have if I were actually in A's immediate vicinity.<sup>57</sup> What I wish to make it clear is that *on either of these two interpretations*, Hume's general point of view significantly weakens the link between phenomenological introspective philosophizing and an account of the nature of moral judgment. For on both interpretations, Humean moral judgments are unhooked from occurrent feelings. On the first interpretation, there is no relevant occurrent feeling at all. On the second interpretation, the moral judgment cannot be simply read off the feeling (the judgment does not track what is happening in the "heart").

So, despite his use of phenomenological claims in attacks on rationalism and egoism, Hume provides materials that can be used to develop a dispositional account of moral judgment that does not depend on robust phenomenological claims. Can the same be said of Hutcheson? I do not think so. Even though Hutcheson does advance a number of non-phenomenological arguments for his position, phenomenology generally remains near the center of his account of moral judgment.

### 5.2 *Hutcheson's Distinction Between Correct and Incorrect Moral Judgments*

Hutcheson does not think that every occurrent moral approval is equally legitimate. He carves out conceptual space between one's actual moral feeling and the moral feeling one ought to have. Specifically, he holds that a reaction of moral approval is legitimate (it is the moral reaction that it is correct for one to have) only if one experiences that approval when one is swayed neither by "mistaken" beliefs about the object of evaluation nor by "fantastick associations of ideas."<sup>58</sup> We can thus offer to Hutcheson—and aspects of his position will allow him to accept—a view according to which a moral judgment of mine is correct only if it accords with the moral affection I would have if I responded to the object of evaluation in light of the relevant non-moral facts and without being influenced by prejudicial mental distortions.

But even though Hutcheson denies that one's occurrent sentimental experiences are necessarily probative of what is the correct moral judgment for one to make, he still does not distance himself in any significant way from a robustly phenomenological account of moral judgment. For, unlike Hume, Hutcheson shows

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<sup>57</sup>I do not think, however, that this putative problem with the first interpretation is really a problem at all. What Hume needs for the anti-rationalist motivational argument to go through is merely the claim that we humans would never have made moral judgments if we had never experienced sentiments. To defeat the rationalists, Hume needs to show only that it is false that we would have made moral distinctions if we were purely, entirely rational beings. Now, the first interpretation of the general point of view is entirely consistent with this anti-rationalist point, as it says that the idea of approval we sometimes use to make moral judgment (i.e., when we make moral judgments about someone without being in her immediate vicinity) is one we would have not ever possessed if we did not first have the experience of the sentiment of approval. For another explanation of how a Humean can coherently claim that not all moral judgments involve any particular occurrent motivation, see Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), which develops a Humean account that aims to capture both the central insight of the motivational argument against moral rationalism and the possibility that we often make moral judgments without experiencing any particular occurrent moral feeling. For further discussion of this issue, see Kate Abramson, "Two Portraits of the Humean Moral Agent," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 83 (2002): 301–34.

<sup>58</sup>*Essay* 102. I discuss this view of Hutcheson's in Gill, *British Moralists*, ch. 14.

vanishingly little awareness of the fact that people often make moral judgments based on how they would feel under certain circumstances, rather than on how they actually feel at the moment when they make the judgment. Hutcheson's discussion seems to proceed on the assumption that the moral judgment one makes will flow from one's occurrent moral sentiment—that when one makes a positive moral judgment, one will actually be feeling the corresponding sentiment of approval at the time. For Hutcheson, if one is concerned to make a correct moral judgment, one must actually consciously attend to the relevant non-moral facts and make sure to free oneself of associative mental distortions. Hutcheson does not seem to possess Hume's understanding of our facility at making judgments that are "loosen'd" from our occurrent affective states.<sup>59</sup>

There is, however, one passage in *Illustrations on the Moral Sense* in which Hutcheson does seem to allow that one can make a moral judgment without experiencing any particular occurrent moral sentiment at the time.

[W]hether our *moral Sense* be subject to such a Disorder, as to have *different Perceptions*, from the same apprehended *Affections* in an Agent, at *different times*, as the *Eye* may have of the Colours of an unaltered Object, 'tis not easy to determine: Perhaps it will be hard to find any Instances of such a *Change*. What *Reason* could correct, if it fell into such a *Disorder*, I know not; except suggesting to its *Remembrance* its former *Approbations*, and representing the *general Sense* of Mankind. (*Essay* 178)

Hutcheson seems to be saying here that a person whose moral sense has been corrupted can nonetheless make a correct moral judgment, and that he can do so because his moral judgment need not reflect his occurrent sentiments. And in holding this, Hutcheson seems to be rejecting the occurrent phenomenal presence claim and affirming a non-phenomenological account, in that he seems to be saying that one can make a moral judgment without experiencing any particular moral sentiment. Still, it does not seem to me that Hutcheson took very seriously the idea that someone could make a moral judgment without having a corresponding phenomenally-occurrent sentimental experience. The possibility of a such an event is something he allows he may have to acknowledge, but he thinks that it "will be hard to find any" actual examples of it. For Hutcheson, this possibility is more in the way of what we would think of as a science fiction example—something that is highly speculative, a bare possibility. For Hume, in contrast, moral judgments that are "loosen'd" from occurrent affective states are typical; the norm in many day-to-day contexts.

So far as I can see, moreover, while Hume's general point of view gives us a non-phenomenological way of distinguishing moral feelings from non-moral ones, Hutcheson never gives us any way of making this distinction other than by phenomenology alone. The questionable anti-egoist phenomenological claim—that moral approvals have a unique phenomenally distinctive quality—is something to which Hutcheson seems to be firmly committed.

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<sup>59</sup>Hutcheson was at least as concerned with explaining how we can achieve mental health and happiness as he was with explaining how we can make correct moral judgments; and in order to be mentally healthy and happy, and not simply to make correct moral judgments, we need to ensure that our passions are in their original, God-given, association-free state. This may explain why Hutcheson seems primarily concerned with how to feel the right thing, and not simply with how to make a correct judgment.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Moral sentimentalists claim that there is a deep, important similarity between the origin of our moral distinctions and the passions of pride, anger, and love.<sup>60</sup> This claim of similarity does not gain much support, however, from the phenomenology of moral judgment. For, while there are many different things we might have in mind when speaking of anger, pride, and love, on one plausible way of thinking, a person's phenomenal experience is largely, if not entirely, determinative of whether she is angry, proud, or in love. On this way of thinking, there is little or no difference between, on the one hand, feeling anger, feeling pride, and feeling love and, on the other hand, being angry, being proud, and being in love. But it is not legitimate—not even for a moral sentimentalist—to construe moral judgment in a parallel way. An account of morality has to maintain clear conceptual space between one's having a positive feeling toward A and one's thinking that A is virtuous.

This difference between anger, pride, and love, on the one hand, and moral judgment, on the other, is something that Hutcheson never fully appreciated. In Book 2 and the first part of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume fell short in similar ways. But in the third part of Book 3—in his discussion of the general point of view—Hume did capture the difference. This was a significant advance for sentimentalist moral theory.

Hume's recognition of how a sentimentalist can maintain conceptual space between our occurrent feelings and our moral judgments also points towards an acknowledgement of the general limitations of phenomenology in the development of an account of morality. Because my "heart" often does not "take part" with the "notions"<sup>61</sup> on which my moral judgments are based, I should not expect an account of my moral judgments to track in any simple and direct way the feelings I have when I make those judgments. Our phenomenal experiences on their own may reveal very little of the overall shape and causal history of our moral concepts.

Of course I have only examined here how two eighteenth-century sentimentalists used moral phenomenology to attack some of their rivals. From such a circumscribed study we cannot confidently draw any large conclusions about the uses of moral phenomenology in general.<sup>62</sup> I hope the reader is convinced, however, that

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<sup>60</sup>Moral sentimentalists also sometimes claim that there is a deep, important similarity between the origin of our moral distinctions and the origin of our ideas of color. But while the comparison with color may elucidate some aspects of morality, there are significant differences between the phenomenology of moral judgment and the phenomenology of color experiences. For discussion of the color-virtue comparison, see Simon Blackburn, "Hume on the Mezzanine Level," *Hume Studies* 19 (1993): 273–88, Kenneth P. Winkler, "Hume and Hutcheson on the Color of Virtue," *Hume Studies* 22 (1996): 3–22, Nicholas Sturgeon, "Moral Skepticism and Moral Naturalism in Hume's *Treatise*," *Hume Studies* 27 (2001): 3–83, and Gill, *British Moralists*, ch. 19. Yet a third comparison the moral sentimentalists often draw is between moral judgments and judgments of beauty. The morality-beauty comparison seems to me to capture the phenomenology of moral judgment much better than either the comparison of virtue to color or the comparison of virtue to pride, anger, and love. I discuss the sentimentalists' virtue-beauty comparison in Gill, "Moral Sentimentalism vs. Moral Rationalism."

<sup>61</sup>*Treatise* 3.3.3.2.

<sup>62</sup>See Horgan and Timmons, "Moral Phenomenology and Moral Theory," for a contrasting, more optimistic view of the role phenomenology can play in moral philosophy.

in the works we have examined, the arguments that require robust phenomenological claims fail to advance the philosophical cause to which they are put, while the strongest arguments stand free of anything robustly phenomenological.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Earlier versions of this paper were given at the *Southwest Early Modern Conference* in San Diego, February 2007, at *Hume Readings* in Rome, June 2007, and at the *International Hume Conference* in Boston, August 2007. The paper improved significantly from the discussion on all three of those occasions, and I owe a special thanks to Elizabeth Radcliffe, who gave me many helpful comments on the paper in Boston. I also benefited greatly from the comments of Terry Horgan, Uriah Kriegel, David Owen, Mark Timmons, and two anonymous referees for the *Journal*.