

Moral Distinctiveness and Moral Inquiry

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Actions can be moral or immoral, surely, but can also be prudent or imprudent, rude or polite, sportsmanlike or unsportsmanlike, and so on. The fact that diverse methods of evaluating action exist seems to give rise to a further question: what distinguishes moral evaluation in particular? In this article, my concern is methodological. I argue that any account of the distinctiveness of morality cannot be prior to substantive inquiry into the content of moral reasons, requirements, and concerns. The genuine distinctiveness of morality will become clear only after we have determined what those very reasons, requirements, and concerns really are.

However important moral standards may be, surely we can all agree that they aren't the only ways to evaluate action. Actions can be moral or immoral, surely, but can also be prudent or imprudent, honorable or dishonorable, rude or polite, sportsmanlike or unsportsmanlike, and so on. Some of these evaluations are related, some may imply others. But the fact that diverse methods of evaluating action exist seems to give rise to a further question: what distinguishes moral evaluation in particular? This question has a long history, and its persistence is easy to understand.¹ To account for the distinctiveness of morality has long been thought crucial to the conduct of moral inquiry. Without first understanding what distinguishes morality in particular, we have the potential to end up with a moral theory that confuses specifically moral norms with those of distinct domains.

In this article, I will not present a theory of morality's distinguishing characteristics (though, in conclusion, I will briefly suggest what the best account will look like). Rather, my concern is methodological. Virtually all

1. For a brief, and certainly not comprehensive, survey of the literature, see G. J. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1967); Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958); Bernard Gert, *Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Brad Hooker, "The Definition of Morality" (unpublished manuscript, University of Reading); Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 47.

who attempt to account for the distinctiveness of moral standards do so in a way that is prior to substantive moral inquiry. The distinctiveness of morality is presented not as a result of an investigation into the content of the moral point of view, but rather as (implicitly, if not explicitly) a way to independently shape or constrain such inquiry. Call the project of fixing the distinctiveness of morality prior to substantive moral investigation The Project. In this article, I argue that The Project cannot succeed. Though morality is surely distinct from other domains, morality's distinctiveness cannot be settled prior to substantive inquiry into the content of moral reasons, requirements, and concerns. Rather, the genuine distinctiveness of morality will become clear only after we have determined what those requirements, reasons, and concerns really are.

My argument proceeds in the following way. In the first section, I introduce The Project in more detail, the tests any potential distinguishing mark of morality must pass to be successful on The Project's terms, and the surprising reach of The Project in contemporary moral theorizing. Beginning in the second section, I discuss five potential accounts of morality's distinctiveness, none of which (I argue) can satisfy The Project; I argue that the failure of these accounts is good evidence, not dispositive of course, that The Project should be abandoned. In Section V, I conclude by drawing a number of lessons for future moral inquiry in light of The Project's demise.

I. THE PROJECT, ITS REQUIREMENTS, AND ITS REACH

Consider the notion of a *domain* or *standard* or *standpoint* (I'll use these terms interchangeably). As I understand these ideas, a domain or standpoint can be defined in functional terms: domains issue evaluative verdicts (of varying kinds) about particular targets by taking, as inputs, particular facts about these targets.² Morality is a domain in this sense; so is aesthetics, etiquette, sportsmanship, and so on. With all this in mind, The Project is an effort to distinguish the moral domain—that is, determine a particular property or set of properties that applies to morality in particular—prior to substantive first-order investigation into the content of moral requirements, reasons, and so forth; prior, that is, to determining the right theory of the moral domain. Put in this way, The Project may seem a pretty niche enterprise. Why conduct it?

The most important answer to this question, at least according to many, is that morality's distinguishing marks play an important role in setting the terms of moral inquiry. To see this, consider the following passage by Warnock: "When philosophers discuss moral principles, *what*

2. More on this in Dale Dorsey, *The Limits of Moral Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chap. 1.

are they discussing? What does ‘moral’ mean? What distinguishes a moral view from views of other kinds? I think it must be quite clear that there is no easy answer to these questions; and yet, until they are answered, it seems that moral philosophers cannot really know what they are talking about, or at any rate, perhaps no less importantly, cannot be sure whether or not they are all talking about the same thing.”³ Brad Hooker says something similar: “When trying to decide which rival moral theory seems best to us, we should ascertain, among other things, how well these theories cohere with our most confident moral convictions about moral principles and about more or less specific kinds of cases. To run that test on moral theories, however, we need to be able to distinguish our moral convictions from other kinds of conviction.”⁴ The thoughts of Hooker and Warnock can be glossed in the following way. In attempting to determine the correct moral theory, we test substantive theories and particular verdicts against our considered moral judgments. But we don’t test moral theories against judgments that lack moral content (for instance, a judgment that one ought to wear one’s cummerbund with the pleats up-facing). Hence we must know what distinguishes a considered judgment that someone ought to ϕ with moral content from one without moral content. Otherwise we would get a distorted moral theory, one that is not genuinely moral. Notice that for both Warnock and Hooker, one cannot even begin the project of moral inquiry unless and until one knows morality’s distinguishing marks. For Warnock and Hooker, these distinguishing marks form a kind of “gatekeeper”: for any X (requirement, reason, etc.) to be a genuinely moral X—and for the judgment that X is a reason, requirement, and so on, to have genuinely moral content—it must be compatible with the distinguishing property of the moral domain. Thus we arrive at The Project: an attempt to determine the distinguishing property or properties of the moral domain prior to, and in a way that would set the boundaries of, substantive moral investigation.

What would a successful, Project-satisfying mark of the moral look like? Quite generally, when it comes to the distinctiveness of morality, we are looking for a particular property (or collection of properties) that holds of morality and no other domains—that is, that distinguishes it. But it must, plausibly, do more than this. First, any account of the distinctiveness of morality, besides homing in on a property that is genuinely unique of the moral domain, must pick out a property that is sufficiently robust. I won’t give a precise theory of what it means for a property to be robust in this sense. I’m not going to commit to the claim, for instance, that morality’s distinguishing marks must be necessary or essential. (The project of distinguishing morality is, at least as I understand it here, the

3. Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 52.

4. Hooker, “The Definition of Morality,” 1.

project of figuring out how to distinguish morality from other domains in this world, not across possible worlds.) However, it should be the case that the distinguishing properties aren't entirely accidental; the relevant property should continue to track morality assuming relatively trivial changes or counterfactuals. For instance, it would certainly be unacceptable to distinguish morality from other domains by noting the, surely correct, claim that morality is the domain that is most often argued about by those who have written PhD dissertations on moral philosophy—it would be wrong to say that the requirement to eat salad with the left-most fork is now a rule of morality just on the grounds of some peculiar sociological shift. I take it that the requirement of robustness should be relatively intuitive, even if the concept, along the margins, isn't precisely theorized.

Now, to merely distinguish morality it would be sufficient, say, to figure out what particular theory of moral reasons, requirements, and concerns is true, and identify that as morality's mark. But, quite obviously, this would not be to satisfy The Project; to satisfy The Project, the distinctive features of morality must be determinable prior to the conduct of substantive inquiry into the nature of moral reasons, requirements, and so forth ("first-order" moral inquiry). If the distinctiveness of morality has to await the results of first-order inquiry, it would be impotent to determine what is admissible in such an inquiry, that is, to keep the gate.

What sort of epistemic status must a distinguishing property have to be prior to substantive inquiry? One possible answer is that it must be nonnegotiable, that is, unrevisable on the basis of subsequent investigation. This seems plausible: after all, if we hold that a particular distinguishing property p could be revised on the basis of first-order investigation, it would be hard to say that we have established p truly distinguishes the moral domain from all others prior to conducting that investigation. Furthermore, it seems hard to fathom, if The Project is motivated—a la Warnock and Hooker—by the need for a gatekeeper, that first-order investigation could influence whether we accept Project-satisfying distinguishing properties. For the distinguishing property to be the right kind of gatekeeper is for that property to, at least in part, determine what sorts of judgments (such as " r is a moral reason to ϕ ," "it is plausible to say that A must ψ in circumstances c ," and so on) count as relevant to first-order moral inquiry and which are irrelevant. But if this is correct, any potential judgment that is inconsistent with the gatekeeping property will already have been declared nonmoral in content, or otherwise irrelevant to substantive inquiry. And so we had better be confident that morality's distinguishing properties are fixed independently of substantive first-order inquiry that is conducted only in light of morality's special distinctiveness.

Of course, one might reasonably question this. Must we really say that the distinguishing features of the moral domain are absolutely un-

revisable on the basis of subsequent investigation?⁵ For the sake of argument, assume not. However, even if one needn't commit to the claim that these distinguishing properties will hold come what may, that morality's distinctiveness is prior to substantive inquiry, and determines what is and isn't admissible in first-order moral theorizing, seems to entail that confidence in them should be *quite high*. How high? It's hard to state precisely, but the following seems to me a sensible test: to say that an account of the distinctiveness of morality—what distinguishes morality and moral inquiry in particular—is prior to substantive moral inquiry is at least to say that this account can plausibly declare particular propositions, judgments, and so forth as relevant or irrelevant to first-order investigation. In other words, it is at least to say that this account of morality's distinctiveness can serve the gatekeeping role that motivates The Project in the first place. If, for instance, it is not plausible to rule out of moral consideration a proposition *r* that conflicts with a purported distinguishing property *p*, then we couldn't possibly have established that *p* characterizes the distinctiveness of the moral domain prior to a determination of the substantive merits of *p* versus *r*. And though this leaves open the possibility that we may be mistaken about whether *p* holds of or properly distinguishes morality,⁶ it shows that we must be very confident indeed in any Project-satisfying distinguisher.

Given the epistemic demands of The Project, one might wonder who, in fact, takes it up.⁷ But The Project is more widespread than it may seem: virtually all who discuss the distinctiveness of morality offer their view not only as prior to substantive inquiry, but as fulfilling the gatekeeping role that necessitates The Project. For instance, Shafer-Landau and Cuneo hold that what distinguishes morality from other domains is the presence of a list of propositions identified as “moral fixed points.”⁸ However, for Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, these propositions are quite clearly intended to satisfy The Project: any “consistent body of moral propositions that apply to beings like us in a world such as ours” must display these “fixed points.”⁹ Furthermore, they insist that these propositions have the strong epistemic status required by The Project: we would

5. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this point quite helpfully.

6. For instance, we may conduct first-order inquiry treating *p* as a gatekeeper, but find that when all is said and done, this theory is terribly unattractive; we might then revisit *p* qua distinguishing property.

7. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer. While I think virtually all who discuss the distinctiveness of morality take up The Project (including those mentioned in the next two paragraphs), not all do. Bernard Williams's discussion of morality's distinctiveness (in *Morality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 73–78) seems to me an important exception.

8. Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo, “The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism,” *Philosophical Studies* 171 (2014): 399–443, 405–6.

9. *Ibid.*, 404.

revise them only if our strongest considered judgments were illusory.¹⁰ In addition, Mackie insists that “a morality” (in the narrow sense, see below) is a domain “whose central task is to protect the interests of persons other than the agent.” For Mackie, this determines what counts as a genuinely moral consideration.¹¹ Gibbard says something similar, but with a different distinguishing mark: “all norms, in a sense, are norms of rationality but moral norms in particular are norms for the rationality of guilt and resentment.”¹² For Gibbard, this determines just what sorts of judgments have moral content: “to *think* an act *morally reprehensible* is to accept norms that prescribe, for such a situation, guilt on the part of the agent and resentment on the part of others.”¹³ For Philippa Foot, what counts as “evidence in morals” (read: what is admissible in first-order moral inquiry—what passes the gate) must be determined by some general reference to morality’s distinctive concern with well-being and cognate concepts (such as harm).¹⁴ Somewhat more recently, Nicholas Southwood has insisted that morality has a distinctive ground (i.e., it is grounded independent of social practice).¹⁵ For Southwood, as for the others discussed and cited here, morality’s distinctive ground determines what sorts of judgments have moral content—for a normative judgment to be grounded in some other way is dispositive evidence that such a judgment fails to have a place in a genuinely moral investigation.¹⁶

In addition, The Project operates as a sort of “shadow thesis,” as it were, standing behind a number of influential arguments in normative ethics. Indeed, many have marshalled the gatekeeping function of morality’s distinguishing marks in an attempt to reject various first-order moral theories. Consequentialism has been a prime target of such arguments. Stephen Darwall is chief among those who make this move. According to Darwall, there is a distinctive connection between morality and the notion of “accountability” and the reactive attitudes—this is

10. *Ibid.*, 415.

11. J. L. Mackie, *Morality: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 106. Those who follow Mackie here include T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6–7.

12. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 47. Those who share Gibbard’s view include John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, V.14; Douglas Portmore, *Commonsense Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43–44; Stephen Darwall, “Morality’s Distinctiveness,” in *Morality, Authority, and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Hooker, “The Definition of Morality”; and many others.

13. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 47. The first emphasis mine, the second his.

14. Philippa Foot, “Moral Arguments,” in *Virtue and Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 96–109, 105–6. Warnock’s view is similar. See Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 57.

15. Nicholas Southwood, “The Moral/Conventional Distinction,” *Mind* 120 (2011): 761–802.

16. See *ibid.*, 761–64.

what renders morality distinct from, for example, etiquette and other domains.¹⁷ On this basis, Darwall claims that utilitarian moral theories are false, not as a result of a substantive first-order inquiry into their merits or demerits, but rather because they generate “reasons of the wrong kind to justify moral obligation” in light of morality’s distinctive connection to blame and accountability.¹⁸ In a way very similar to Darwall, Douglas Portmore argues, explicitly on the basis of an account of morality’s distinctiveness, that classical forms of utilitarianism are incorrect.¹⁹ Portmore holds that morality’s distinctive normative authority is itself a gate-keeping constraint on moral theorizing.²⁰ Bernard Gert also marshals the “definition” of morality to reject consequentialism.²¹ Of course, consequentialism is not the only target of arguments of this kind. Famously, John Stuart Mill refers to his own account of morality’s distinctiveness to rule out a number of potential notions of justice as playing a role in understanding that concept’s moral purport.²² Furthermore, Scanlon argues, on the basis of an account of morality’s narrow sense (the sense relevant here, see below), that moral theories that include prohibitions against certain forms of consensual sex are simply ruled out.²³ And so on.²⁴

Thus as a sociological matter, The Project is well entrenched. And, I think, it’s easy to see why. After all, why should we be interested in what’s distinctive of morality, rather than the more pedestrian question of what’s *true* of morality? Why be concerned with morality’s peculiar ground, source, content, relations with other normative concepts, rather than with figuring out, by whatever inquiry is necessary, what morality’s ground, source, content, and so forth, is? The natural answer is that in coming to understand what distinguishes the moral domain from other sorts of domains, we better understand how to sort judgments, reasons, require-

17. Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 91–95. For Darwall, there is a “conceptual connection between imputing wrong and blame” (94), and that his argument against consequentialism rests on the supposition that “responsibility and [moral] obligation are conceptually tied in the ways we have noted” (103).

18. *Ibid.*, 91.

19. Portmore, *Commonsense Consequentialism*, 29.

20. See, especially, *ibid.*, 29, 43–44.

21. See Gert, *Morality*, 6. and 149–51.

22. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, V.14.

23. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 172.

24. A note: to rule out particular competitor moral theories in this way it is not strictly speaking required to fully distinguish morality from other domains—it is required only to pick out an essential property that holds independently of substantive moral inquiry and note that the particular theory isn’t compatible with that property, whether or not any other domain also maintains that property. However, for present purposes this fact is moot; the argumentative maneuvers on offer here make reference specifically to features that are intended not just to be robust features of morality, but features that are particular to morality.

ments, and so on into those that are genuinely relevant for the business of figuring out the truth about morality, in particular. And while not all will agree with Hooker and Warnock that without such gatekeepers moral inquiry is doomed, it is clear that the use of the distinctiveness of morality as a gatekeeper—which motivates The Project—plausibly explains the interest in morality’s distinctive features, over and above the question of morality’s *features*.

Two notes should be made here prior to my substantive examination of The Project. First, the term “morality” plausibly comes in two senses, as distinguished here by Mackie: “A morality in the broad sense would be a general, all-inclusive theory of conduct: the morality to which someone subscribed would be whatever body of principles he allowed ultimately to guide or determine his choices of action. In the narrow sense, a morality is a system of a particular sort of constraints on conduct—one whose central task is to protect the interests of persons other than the agent and which present themselves to an agent as checks on his natural inclinations or spontaneous tendencies to act.”²⁵ Insofar as The Project seeks to identify the fundamental distinguishing conditions of morality, etiquette, and so forth, The Project seeks to distinguish morality in its narrow sense. Of course, it could be an important result that there is no genuine distinction between morality’s narrow and broad senses. Indeed, someone could seek to distinguish morality’s narrow sense by identifying it with morality’s broad sense. (More on this proposal in Sec. IV.) However, The Project as I’m understanding it here seeks to distinguish morality’s narrow sense rather than its broad sense. Because morality’s broad sense is “all-inclusive,” inquiry into morality in this sense need not be constrained or limited by an understanding of morality, generally. Because it is an all-inclusive guide to conduct, all judgments are relevant.

Second, and building on the first, it is possible that The Project is simply fundamentally misguided, for the following reason: just as there is a distinction between broad and narrow senses of the term “morality,” there may also be further senses of morality, namely, those picked out by different potential distinguishing characteristics.²⁶ So, for instance, Mill and Gibbard may use the term “morality” simply to pick out the norms relevant to praise and blame; Foot may use the term to refer to norms relevant to well-being and cognate concepts; Mackie may use it to pick out norms that are generally other-regarding, and so on. This would entail, of course, that these philosophers are simply talking past each other, and hence there may be no substantive issue when it comes to the distinguishing mark of morality. However, this interpretation of the di-

25. Mackie, *Morality*, 106.

26. Thanks to Roger Crisp for suggesting this possibility.

alectic should be treated as a last resort. First, I'm willing to allow practitioners of The Project the assumption that there is a genuine issue to be discussed here, namely, the delineation of a particular action-evaluative domain called "morality," which differs (at least conceptually) from etiquette, prudence, norms of sportsmanship, and so on. The question, then, is why and how it so differs; what distinguishes the moral domain from others. We may, of course, discover that we've been using this term in different senses all along; but I suggest we conclude this only after exhausting the possibilities (including possibilities I suggest in the last section of this article) for coming to agreement concerning the distinguishing features of the moral domain. And second, to insist that the distinguishing characteristics of morality are merely stipulative threatens to strip arguments against particular moral theories that rely on The Project of all force. It would not do, for instance, to argue against utilitarianism by suggesting that utilitarianism provides "reasons of the wrong kind," on the basis of a stipulative account of morality's distinguishing characteristics.²⁷

My examination of The Project's prospects will proceed by investigating the most significant accounts of morality's distinctiveness. Of course, I won't be able to investigate them all, as the number of potential proposals is far too large. But there are five that I believe are worthy of special treatment. If none of these succeed in vindicating The Project, this is good evidence, not proof of course, that The Project is in real trouble. These accounts are:

1. *The Content View*: morality has a distinctive set of concerns, requirements, and reasons for action.
2. *The Grounds View*: morality maintains a distinctive ground or source.
3. *The Reactive Attitudes View* (RA View): morality is such that failure to conform to its demands yields appropriate guilt and makes one the appropriate target of reactive attitudes.
4. *The Motivational View*: morality has a special connection to the motivational states of rational agents.
5. *The Normativity View*: morality has distinctive normative force; that is, one is normatively required to conform to moral requirements to a greater extent than requirements of other domains.

27. Note that Darwall, at one point, suggests that his conceptual connection between moral obligation on the one hand and accountability on the other could just be stipulated. See Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint*, 95. But it's clear that, for Darwall, he believes that his account of the distinctiveness of morality isn't just stipulative: it tracks the common concept of morality, or at least the concept of morality shared by the moral theorists with whom he's engaging. Indeed, this is explicit in Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint*, 95. See also Darwall, "Morality's Distinctiveness."

In the next section, I discuss the the Content View, followed by the Grounds View in Section III. In Section IV, I discuss the RA View, Motivational View, and Normativity View together.

II. A DECENT PLACE TO START: CONTENT

Let's start with morality's content. To distinguish the moral domain by reference to its content smacks of rugged good sense. After all, what distinguishes morality and, say, prudence? Surely the facts that each domain takes as relevant (as an "input" in evaluation (what these domains "care about"): morality cares about people other than the agent; prudence cares only about the agent's interests. What distinguishes morality and etiquette? Again, what these domains care about: morality cares, for instance, about the quality of peoples' lives, etiquette is concerned with social niceties, and so on. Indeed, there are many potential accounts of morality's distinctive content. As Mackie does in the passage cited above, one could distinguish morality by the claim that it is other-regarding: its obligations refer specifically to those other than the agent herself. Alternatively, one could identify a set of moral reasons or concerns that must be respected for any potential moral theory to count as admissible. Other proposals, as well as various hybrids, are certainly possible.

Reference to morality's content qua distinguisher seems like a good place to start for two reasons. First, it seems relatively trivial that morality has a distinctive content. Surely no other domain cares about exactly the same things, and to exactly the same degree, issuing exactly the same evaluations, as morality (or so I shall assume for the sake of argument here). And, second, morality's content is strongly robust. Notice that we often "take up" standpoints: we evaluate such-and-such an action from a particular domain, we guide our decisions by taking up a particular standpoint, and so forth. Commonsensically, to take up a standpoint like morality, say, is simply to allow one's deliberation or evaluation to be guided by certain characteristic concerns rather than others; to see particular facts about an action as relevant and as possessing a certain valence, and to leave aside other facts that don't matter to this particular mode of evaluation. Thus, or so it would appear, it is sufficient to take up morality rather than some other domain for one to deliberate or evaluate given a distinctive content, set of concerns or reasons, and to generate particular evaluations or demands on the basis of that content, those reasons, concerns, and so on. Thus morality's content is not a mere accidental property but is instead robust in just the way a distinguishing characteristic ought to be.

However, or so I shall claim, there are good reasons to believe that a content-based view cannot satisfy The Project. The key is the special

epistemic status required by a Project-satisfying distinguisher. Note that for a particular content-based property to be prior to substantive moral inquiry, this property must be sufficiently “coarse-grained.” To see what I mean by this, note that if a candidate content-based property p were incompatible with a number of plausibly recognized moral theories, it would hardly be plausible to say that we know p holds prior to investigation of the substantive merits of p . It would certainly be implausible, in other words, to say that any inconsistent judgments or propositions should be just ruled out of substantive moral investigation. But, second, for p to be genuinely distinctive, p must be sufficiently “fine-grained”: it must close off sufficient normative concerns to plausibly distinguish morality from other domains that may share such concerns. But these criteria are obviously in tension. The more fine-grained, and hence the more plausible it becomes to say that p is a genuine distinguishing criterion, the more implausible it is to say that that p can maintain the strong epistemic status required for p to be a Project-satisfying distinguisher. Call this the “coarse/fine tension.”

To see this problem in more detail, consider a proto-version of Mackie’s view, namely, that morality in the narrow sense is distinguished by its other-regardingness. (Mackie’s actual view is more complex, see n. 28; we might call a pure other-regardingness proposal the “sub-Mackien view.”) This criterion is not sufficiently fine-grained. Take etiquette. I cannot act rudely if there is no one to whom my rudeness is directed, or who takes my behavior as offensive, or who would take my behavior as offensive under standard conditions, and so forth. Indeed, not only are there many other-regarding domains, the number seems virtually unlimited. Take feudal norms. These norms indicate how the members of divergent social classes ought to treat each other; given that they govern behavior in interaction between social classes, however, they are necessarily other-regarding (no one is in a different social class than herself). Take also norms of sportsmanship. Sportsmanship norms are concerned specifically with the proper treatment of one’s opponent in the context of games or matches. (You cannot be a poor sport in a purely self-regarding way.) And hence sportsmanship would appear to be other-regarding in the sense under consideration.

This shows that the sub-Mackien view is not sufficiently fine-grained: it does not zero in specifically on morality rather than on a family of other-regarding (but independent) domains. As far as The Project is concerned, to use mere other-regardingness as a gatekeeper risks letting in too much: confusing our moral inquiry with inquiry into, say, feudal norms, and so on. Thus one has to supplement the claim that morality is other-regarding with additional content-based properties to render it specific enough to plausibly serve as a distinguishing mark of the moral. In particular, one

might say that morality (and not feudal norms, etc.) is concerned with others' well-being in a way that feudal norms aren't.²⁸ Etiquette also seems unconcerned with well-being. As a polite person, my behavior is not determined by what would make other people's lives better. Instead, it is guided by traditional social norms—"what's done"—and the like.

But to supplement an other-regarding approach in this way, while it is specific enough to rule out etiquette, runs into the contrary problem. By becoming sufficiently fine-grained, it is now too fine-grained: it is not coarse-grained enough to be adequately prior to substantive inquiry, to serve as a gatekeeper. Take the following case:

Johnny: Johnny's uncle Stan recently died. While he was dying, however, Stan asked Johnny to give a piece of old costume jewelry he has been keeping for years to a long-lost schoolyard sweetheart. After his uncle dies, however, Johnny decides to pawn the jewelry for \$10 for the purposes of gambling in a local casino.

I'm unsure of whether Johnny has done anything morally wrong here. But it certainly doesn't seem ruled out to say that the fact that Johnny didn't conform to his uncle's wishes is itself good reason for thinking that his action is something that morality evaluates negatively (independently, say, of facts about Johnny's, Stan's, or Stan's sweetheart's welfare or interests). Of course, there's a reply to be made here. It could very well be that a well-being-based account of morality might allow a blanket rule against, say, ignoring the wishes of the dead, perhaps for so trivial a cause.²⁹ Various forms of rule-utilitarianism or -consequentialism seem suited to that task. But, and here's the crucial question, is it plausible to suggest that the only justification for a rule against Johnny's behavior that is allowed a substantive hearing is one that adverts to welfarist considerations? Surely not. Thus whether morality is strictly concerned with others' well-being seems not to be prior to substantive investigation. Thus "other-regardingness" can't work as a Project-satisfying distinguisher: it runs into the tension between the coarse-grainedness required to satisfy The Project and the fine-grainedness required to be genuinely distinctive.

Here's another way to bring out this tension. Shafer-Landau and Cuneo identify a set of "moral fixed points": propositions that serve to delineate the moral domain, which could, in principle, serve to satisfy The Project: no incompatible judgments are admissible in a purely moral

28. This seems to be something more like Mackie's actual view, as stated in the previous quotation. See also Foot, "Moral Arguments"; Williams, *Morality*, 73–81; Warnock, *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 57.

29. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer.

inquiry (for the sake of brevity I'll quote only a few here, as that is sufficient to give you the flavor):

- It is pro tanto wrong to engage in the recreational slaughter of a fellow person.
- It is pro tanto wrong to break a promise on which another is relying simply for convenience's sake.
- It is pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure.
- It is pro tanto wrong to torture others just because they have inconvenienced you.
- It is pro tanto wrong to impose severe burdens on others simply because of their physical appearance....³⁰

The coarse/fine tension once again arises. Question: how do we interpret the claim that it is "pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure"? Three possibilities suggest themselves. The first insists that to say that it is "pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure" just is to say that *the fact that ϕ -ing humiliates others simply for pleasure* is itself a moral reason against ϕ -ing. But this interpretation renders the claims in question too fine-grained. For instance, imagine a moral view according to which all moral reasons against action should advert to considerations about well-being and/or harm in particular. Call this "the harm view." I submit that the harm view should not be ruled out of first-order moral inquiry without a substantive hearing. But the current interpretation of the relevant "fixed point" does: on this interpretation, the moral reason against humiliation does not advert to harm—merely to humiliation per se. The second potential interpretation is to say that there is always some reason or other not to humiliate others simply for pleasure (whether or not *that it is to humiliate for pleasure* is itself the reason). But, again, this is too fine-grained. There surely could be cases in which, according to the harm view, there is no reason not to humiliate for pleasure, namely, when it causes no harm. This possibility is not conceptually ruled out, or even particularly hard to imagine (perhaps, e.g., I could humiliate someone who is prudentially indifferent to humiliation, and whose humiliation would generate substantial pleasure for many very poorly-off individuals), and hence this interpretation of the relevant claim qua distinguishing property would seem to rule out far too much—surely the harm view should at least pass the gate when it comes to first-order moral inquiry, whether or not we ultimately accept it.

The final interpretation: to insist that it is pro tanto wrong to humiliate others simply for pleasure is to insist that typically there is a rea-

30. Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, "The Moral Fixed Points," 405. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting I discuss views similar to those presented here.

son, whatever that reason is, not to humiliate others simply for pleasure. Assume for the moment that this claim could be established prior to substantive inquiry—indeed, I’m inclined to think this is quite plausible. But this renders the proposed “moral fixed point” far too coarse-grained to distinguish the moral domain. Even prudence typically issues a reason to refuse to humiliate others for pleasure—surely doing so is typically not in our prudential best interests! Plausibly, etiquette, honor norms, and a host of others will also typically insist that we not humiliate others just for pleasure.

Of course, it will be pointed out immediately that each individual “fixed point” needn’t be meant as a necessary and sufficient Project-satisfying distinguisher. Rather, or so the suggestion goes, the distinctiveness of morality could or should be given by the list as a whole (which, admittedly, is abbreviated here). But this is not enough to solve the problem. For the moral fixed points as a group to serve as the content-based distinguisher, it must be that no element is too fine-grained to be plausibly prior to substantive inquiry, that is, rules out something that ought to be allowed in. But this requires us to interpret each element in a way that leaves open the virtual guarantee that many potential domains will accept it. Indeed, only one entry on the entirety of Shafer-Landau and Cuneo’s list plausibly rules out even prudence as counting on the interpretation under which the relevant claims are acceptable gatekeepers, that is, “the interests of others are sometimes morally weightier than our own.” But virtually any other domain (etiquette, for instance) will hold that sometimes the interests of others are weightier, according to that domain, than our own interests.³¹ And hence if we are to interpret these fixed points in a way that allows them to function as gatekeepers—as very coarse-grained—it’s difficult to see how they could be genuinely distinctive even as a collection.

In sum, morality clearly has a distinctive content. So much is trivial. But we should reject the claim that a content-based account of morality’s distinctiveness could satisfy The Project. This is not to say that there could be no a priori truths of morality—perhaps there are. But because distinguishing properties must be sufficiently fine-grained, it is implausible to say that any content-based property that successfully distinguishes morality from myriad other domains could be prior to first-order inquiry. And while I admittedly lack proof that no possible *p* could pass the tests of sufficient fine-grainedness and sufficient coarse-grainedness (perhaps, e.g., the list of fixed points could be revised *just so* to be plausible gatekeepers and also exclusive to morality) I think we are licensed to conclude that there is very strong reason to believe that morality’s distinctive

31. Shafer-Landau and Cuneo, “The Moral Fixed Points,” 405.

content is not prior to substantive moral inquiry, but rather awaits the very inquiry The Project is meant to constrain.

III. GROUND

Plausibly, content-based moral properties cannot satisfy The Project. Second proposal: one might distinguish morality by reference to its distinctive ground or source. (I use these terms interchangeably here.) This is Southwood's approach:

I suggest that [the difference between moral judgments and conventional normative judgments] is a matter of whether what I shall call *social practices* are part of what is *grounding* the judgments. . . . Moral judgments are normative judgments that may not be grounded, even in part, in presumed social practices. Certain grounds are incompatible with being a moral judgment; and the existence of a presumed social practice is a case in point. Where an individual judges that soldiers must not rape women in war, if this is a genuine moral judgment, it may not be the case that, in that individual's mind, a social practice of not raping women in war constitutes any non-derivative aspect of the justification for the requirement that soldiers not rape women in war. In this sense moral judgments are essentially *practice-independent*.³²

What is a "ground," you ask? For Southwood, it is the justification or explanation of a particular moral reason or requirement. Chris Heathwood helpfully puts the notion of a ground or source like this: "Assuming some moral claims are true, what *makes* them true? . . . *In virtue of what* are they true? This grounding relation is an explanatory relation in that when one fact is grounded in another, or made true by it, the latter explains the former."³³ Though there is obviously significant metaethical disagreement concerning the source/ground of moral norms,³⁴ or even whether moral norms have a source at all,³⁵ it may be that whatever morality's source is, it is distinct from, for example, etiquette, the law, and various other do-

32. Southwood, "The Moral/Conventional Distinction," 774, 780–81.

33. Chris Heathwood, "Could Morality Have a Source?," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 6 (2012): 1–19, 4.

34. In particular, one notes the realist and antirealist dispute. This literature is voluminous, but representative proposals include David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sharon Street, "Constructivism about Reasons," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 3, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

35. Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), chap. 1; Heathwood, "Could Morality Have a Source?". For a critique of Dworkin on this topic, see Russ Shafer-Landau, "The Possibility of Metaethics," *Boston University Law Review* 90 (2010): 479–96.

mains.³⁶ In addition, like morality's content, morality's source would seem clearly robust. After all, its source explains the particular content and concerns morality has.

Many different accounts of morality's ground have been offered: moral judgments could be grounded by, for example, an optimal hypothetical contract,³⁷ or a second-personal standpoint in which one demands actions of others,³⁸ the nature of human rationality or autonomy,³⁹ or the "problem of sociality."⁴⁰ But however one understands the grounding or source of morality and moral obligations, I doubt very much that morality's ground or source has the capacity to distinguish morality prior to substantive inquiry. To see this, note that it is at least conceptually possible for a particular grounding property *p* to radically underdetermine the content of the resulting normative domain. Of course, some underdetermination is to be expected: this underdetermination is the playing field of substantive first-order moral inquiry. But I mean something different: radical underdetermination is underdetermination that leaves the content of the resulting domain so unspecified as to plausibly ground more than one domain. Take an example. One could imagine that the problem of sociality grounds not just a domain according to which the well-being of others provides reasons for action, but also one according to which the well-being of only one particular class provides reasons for action, and according to which the members of other classes must be, say, crushed with an iron boot. If both domains are answerable to the problem of sociality, then the most plausible thing to say in this case is that the problem of sociality does not ground a unique domain. Indeed, radical underdetermination of content appears precisely the problem with Southwood's proposal. According to Southwood's approach, the moral domain is not grounded in social practices. But many different normative concerns are not so grounded: a concern for beauty, a concern for my own welfare, and so on. Southwood's approach thus cannot distinguish morality from, for example, prudence and aesthetics (to begin with).⁴¹

36. Notice that the claim that morality has a distinct source in comparison to the law is denied by Crisp. See Roger Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9–12.

37. David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*.

38. Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*.

39. Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

40. David Copp, "Toward a Pluralist and Teleological Theory of Normativity," *Philosophical Issues* 19 (2009): 21–37; Mackie, *Morality*, 111.

41. To be fair, Southwood admits this. See "The Moral/Conventional Distinction," 781 n. 24. Southwood's project is not to distinguish morality from all other domains, but only from conventional domains. As such his proposal is perfectly compatible with everything I say here.

Note that I'm not insisting that such radical underdetermination is entailed by all of the grounding properties on offer. But for any grounding property, it either radically underdetermines content, or it doesn't. If it does—as is the case with Southwood's proposal—then it cannot be the case that the proposed grounding property is sufficient to distinguish morality. Alternatively, it could be that a grounding property or set of grounding properties do not radically underdetermine. If this is correct, then noting that morality maintains a unique ground surely does distinguish it. But to distinguish morality in this way cannot be prior to first-order inquiry. After all, to know that this grounding property holds of morality uniquely, one must know that this grounding property does not radically underdetermine. In particular, one must know something about the content so-grounded: one must know that the so-grounded content plausibly captures concerns that are distinctive of the moral point of view. If these concerns are not distinctive of the moral point of view, then (for all we know) the relevant grounding property radically underdetermines (grounds, perhaps, morality along with etiquette or some other domain). What this suggests is that to know that a particular grounding property does not radically underdetermine—to know that the grounding property is genuinely distinctive—one must first ascertain the distinctive content of the moral domain. Which, as I've already argued, is not prior to substantive moral theorizing.

There is a second and, to my mind, even more significant argument against the proposal to complete The Project with reference to morality's ground or source. Recall the tremendous controversy surrounding morality's source. Let's say that, motivated by this controversy, I take an agnostic stand on morality's source; I'm just not sure where it comes from or what grounds it, and what distinguishes its source from the source of other domains. But if the Grounds View is correct—and if the Grounds View is intended to be the sort of gatekeeper that motivates The Project—I should refrain from claiming with any confidence that at any given point I'm taking up the moral point of view. After all, The Project is intended to delineate the bounds of the moral point of view in a way that picks out those judgments, concerns, reasons, and so forth that are and are not morally relevant. But if I cannot identify the moral point of view by its ground, and if morality's ground is the relevant Project-satisfying distinguisher, then I must remain agnostic about whether or not I'm actually conducting moral evaluation.⁴² But this is absurd. I can, with a relatively

42. An anonymous reviewer suggests that my argument here relies on the admittedly dubious suggestion that I cannot assert that *p* without having knowledge of *p*'s truthmaker. This is not my assertion. I am merely noting here the result of combining the Grounds View with The Project. Because morality's distinguishing marks, according to those who advance The Project, are prior to conducting moral inquiry it must be that to know that I'm actually

high degree of confidence, take up the moral point of view to evaluate the actions of self and others even with a very low degree of confidence in the source or ground of particularly moral obligations—all I need do is direct my deliberation or evaluation given morality's paradigmatic concerns, however they are grounded. And hence if this is correct, it seems wrong to say that the gatekeeper of first-order moral inquiry should be morality's source or ground.

IV. REACTIVE ATTITUDES, MOTIVATION, AND NORMATIVE IMPORTANCE

Now to the RAView, the Motivation View, and the Normativity View. These accounts are importantly different, of course, but I'm going to treat them in parallel here because, or so I argue, their fates are intertwined. The most popular of these is the suggestion that moral obligations have a unique connection to the reactive attitudes, such as blame and indignation.⁴³ As discussed already, this is Gibbard's view. Perhaps the most influential statement of this view is given by Mill:

We do not call anything wrong, unless we mean to imply that a person ought to be punished in some way or other for doing it; if not by law, by the opinion of his fellow-creatures; if not by opinion, by the reproaches of his own conscience. This seems the real turning point of the distinction between morality and simple expediency. It is a part of the notion of Duty in every one of its forms, that a person may rightfully be compelled to fulfil it. Duty is a thing which may be *exacted* from a person, as one exacts a debt. Unless we think that it may be exacted from him, we do not call it his duty.⁴⁴

Similar sentiments are expressed by T. L. S. Sprigge:

A moral code is a system of evaluations and prescriptions conformity to which is encouraged in a society by public opinion. It differs from a code of etiquette in that its supporters are concerned that public

conducting moral inquiry I know that the judgments I maintain have the relevant marks. As Warnock suggests, until the distinguishing marks of morality are determined "moral philosophers cannot really know what they are talking about, or at any rate, perhaps no less importantly, cannot be sure whether or not they are all talking about the same thing" (*Contemporary Moral Philosophy*, 52). But combine this with the Grounds View, and one gets the result that one cannot know one is conducting moral evaluation until one knows the explanatory property of those evaluations. And I agree: this result is entirely absurd. But its absurdity counts against the Grounds View as an attempt to satisfy The Project.

43. The locus classicus of literature on the reactive attitudes is P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1–25.

44. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, V.14.

opinion in all times and places shall back it up or regard it with sympathy. Its supporter may allow that a different moral code would be suitable for a different society, but he must hope that members even of that society would sympathise with enforcement of his society's moral code in his society. He may make the same point by regarding his and all other acceptable moral codes as special applications of a wider moral code which he would like to see enforced by public opinion everywhere on everyone. Public opinion backs up a moral code mainly by the threat that those who infringe it will be less readily accepted members of any community where that public opinion operates. To some extent it may also offer rewards, for it may offer the man who goes beyond what is required to avoid condemnation the prospect of being universally honoured and loved.⁴⁵

For each of these thinkers, failure to conform to moral demands entails that those who so fail to conform are eligible for sanction or blame.⁴⁶ This view has substantial *prima facie* plausibility. The difference, one might say, between doing something imprudent and doing something immoral is that it would seem perfectly appropriate to be blamed for behaving immorally. To behave in an imprudent or ugly way may be a significant or important failure, but it is typically not grounds for indignation; unless, of course, one behaves immorally in the effort.

The Motivation View—that is, that morality maintains a distinctive connection to the motivational states of rational agents—seems relatively straightforward, but a further note should be made regarding the Normativity View. What is a normative account of morality's distinctiveness? Recall the narrow and broad senses of "morality." The broad sense of morality—an "all inclusive" guide to conduct—plausibly answers, in any particular case, the general normative question: how should I live? The narrow sense of morality answers (conceptually, anyway) a different question: how should I live morally speaking (rather than according to etiquette, prudence, and so forth)? To say that morality is distinctive in virtue of its normative importance is to say that I ought to conform to my moral obligations rather than, or at least to a greater extent than, other sorts of obligations. It is to say that I (typically) ought to live in accordance with moral obligations rather than obligations of other domains (when they conflict); there is (typically) a greater balance of practical reasons to conform to moral requirements than requirements of other domains, and so on.

45. T. L. S. Sprigge, "The Definition of a Moral Judgment," *Philosophy* 39 (1964): 301–22, 321–22.

46. This is the conclusion reached also by Brad Hooker and Roger Crisp. See Hooker, "The Definition of Morality"; and Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, 9.

I think the RA View, the Motivation View, and the Normativity View ought to be rejected in one fell swoop. The argument I'm going to offer here is not entirely straightforward, but here are the steps: morality's special normative authority, or so I shall argue, must be explained—but this explanation must make reference to some other property that distinguishes morality from other domains. What could this other property be? Well, it would have to be one of the other potential distinguishing properties. But if morality's distinctive normative authority is explained via its distinctive source, ground, or content, whether morality does have distinctive normative authority cannot be determined prior to substantive inquiry and hence the Normativity View cannot complete The Project. The obvious alternative explanation is a connection to blame or the reactive attitudes (à la Mill, Sprigge, etc.), or a connection to the motivations of rational agents. But these properties cannot explain the distinctive normative authority of morality, because any distinctive connection to motivation or the reactive attitudes maintained by morality must itself be explained by the distinctive normative authority of morality. This yields that not only is a reference to morality's distinctive normative authority unable to satisfy The Project (because, even if true, it cannot be established prior to substantive inquiry), a reference to motivation or the reactive attitudes can't, either (because they rely on a prior assumption of morality's distinctive authority, which, as it turns out, cannot be established prior to substantive inquiry).

Let's start at the beginning. Morality's distinctive normative authority requires explanation. Here's an argument for this.⁴⁷ The following two claims seem extremely plausible if the topic under discussion is morality's narrow sense. Consider:

Nonmoral Authority (NMA): there are at least some nonmoral domains, the requirements of which we have nonderivative reason to conform to.

NMA is true. I certainly have practical reason to be polite rather than rude, prudent rather than imprudent, to advance aesthetic value rather than to hinder it, and so forth. Take now the following:

Morality Competes (MC): the requirements of morality can sometimes compete for normative significance or importance in comparison to the requirements of other domains.

MC claims that there are at least some cases in which the requirements of morality will be opposed to, and will compete for normative significance

47. For more detail, see Dale Dorsey, "How *Not* to Argue against Consequentialism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90 (2015): 20–48.

with, the requirements or evaluations of other standards. Sometimes, for instance, I'm morally required to perform some particular action despite the fact that it is ugly or imprudent; here, morality competes with prudence or aesthetics for normative attention. Again, MC seems to straightforwardly reflect our everyday moral/normative experience.

However, if we accept NMA and MC, those who would distinguish morality and moral judgments by comparative normative significance must hold that in such competition, morality wins, or at least will do so typically or a comparatively large amount of the time (depending, of course, on the level of normative significance being ascribed to morality). But in light of NMA and MC, this fact deserves explanation. What reason can be offered to believe that morality (typically) wins when it faces normative competition? Any such explanation must focus on some property possessed by morality that is not possessed by other normative domains. Otherwise it would not explain the crucial fact that requires explanation, namely, why morality rather than some other domain maintains the requisite level of importance.

One might dispute my claim that morality's importance relies on the assumption of a further distinguishing feature: morality's importance just *is* a conceptual truth of the nature of morality or moral requirement.⁴⁸ But this proposal seems hard to square with the truth of MC and NMA. After all, if we accept these theses, the comparative normative significance of morality is not something that could be ascertained simply by coming to a conceptual understanding of the nature of a moral requirement. Instead, the comparative normative significance of morality is a fact ascertained only by a first-order inquiry into the nature of normativity, of practical rationality, and so forth. This inquiry is independent of the *per se* nature of (narrow) moral demands. To put this another way, once we accept that other domains are normative, and can sometimes compete with moral demands for normative attention, it would appear that an inquiry into morality's broad sense is required to determine whether or not moral requirements, in the narrow sense, are specially significant from the point of view of normativity (i.e., morality's broad sense). Fully understanding the concept of morality's narrow sense can't settle this question.

So to establish that morality maintains the relevant and distinct form of normative authority, we must refer to a further distinguishing feature. But if this is correct, the normative authority of morality cannot distinguish morality by itself. It must be supplemented, at the very least by the property that not only distinguishes morality but also provides the explanation of morality's normative authority. But that's OK. There are

48. Cf. Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), chap. 3.

plenty of other properties that could potentially be distinctive of morality: its content, ground, connection to reactive attitudes, and motivation. Notice, however, that reference to morality's distinctive content is off the table if the Normativity View is to complete The Project. Because morality's distinctive content is not prior to substantive inquiry (as argued before), it follows that morality's distinctive normative authority—if explained by its distinctive content—isn't either. If, on the other hand, we explain the normative authority of morality by means of its ground, to determine that its ground is distinctive—that is, not radically underdeterminate—we must also distinguish it by its content (as already argued), and hence the normative authority of morality is, once again, unable to satisfy The Project. Thus if morality's ground or content explain its distinctive normative authority, morality's distinctive normative authority cannot satisfy The Project. Of course, there are two remaining accounts: the RA View and the Motivation View. They could, in principle, be distinctive of morality and also explain morality's normative authority. However, neither can work.

Begin with the RA View. The RA View can explain the distinctive normative authority of morality only if morality's distinctive connection to the reactive attitudes is not itself explained by morality's distinctive authority. But, or so I argue, this is precisely the case. Any explanation of morality's distinctive connection to the reactive attitudes must make reference to morality's distinctive normative authority. I have argued at length in favor of this conclusion elsewhere.⁴⁹ But the central point is this: we should not be the appropriate target of the reactive attitudes for moral failures if those moral failures are not also normative failures. Recall the general concept of normativity. To say that someone should, in the normative sense, ϕ , is to say that this person ought to ϕ ; that ϕ -ing is part of how this person ought to act or to live. To say that, normatively speaking, one doesn't have to ϕ is to hold that one is perfectly justified in not ϕ -ing, that ϕ -ing, even if it is an obligation of some particular domain, doesn't hold of her as an obligation. Now imagine that there is some moral requirement r that applies to a particular agent A, but that does not form a normative obligation. Would we say that A should be blamed for failing to r even though she is perfectly justified in $\neg r$ -ing? Surely not!

Here's another way to see this. Let's imagine that the Normativity View is false. Let's say that etiquette, instead, maintains a distinctive connection to practical reason in comparison to other domains. Would we say that under these conditions immorality in particular should be the special focus of blame, indignation? No—after all, in comparison to etiquette, it is less important that people live in accordance with moral

49. See Dorsey, "How *Not* to Argue against Consequentialism,"

obligations.⁵⁰ And hence, or so it would appear, any explanation of morality's distinctive connection to the reactive attitudes must defend the claim that it is true of morality, in a distinctive way, that moral failure yields normative failure, or at least does so more typically than other domains. And this just is to defend the special normative significance of morality, that is, the Normativity View.

One might dispute my argument here on the following grounds.⁵¹ Doesn't the claim that the reactive attitudes aren't appropriate for failure of non-normative moral requirements depend on one's theory of reasons? After all, there are surely some actions that are blame- or indignation-worthy, and it seems an easy list to generate: betraying a friend, killing an innocent person, and so on. But whether one violates a normative requirement in the commission of such an act depends on first-order facts of normativity, what theory of reasons is true, and so forth. Indeed, or so it may be claimed, a classic internalist or subjectivist picture of practical reasons may entail that one lacks overriding reason to refrain from such actions.⁵² And hence I'm not licensed, without first determining the first-order facts about normativity, to claim that moral failure without rational failure isn't the appropriate target of, for example, blame.

I think this is an important objection. The crucial assumption is that first-order facts about blameworthiness can be the product of an independent line of inquiry, the results of which may or may not match up with one's theory of practical reasons. However, even if we accept this it presents only a pyrrhic victory for the partisan of either the RA View or the Normativity View. Insofar as we have independent access to the actions that are appropriate targets of such attitudes, whether moral failure is specially connected to the reactive attitudes surely depends on one's theory of morality. And hence even if we reject the necessary con-

50. This is not to say that normative failure is sufficient by itself to merit blame or indignation. For instance, an anonymous reviewer suggests that if all other things are equal, morality may not care about one's purchase of the more effective, rather than less effective, toothpaste. But perhaps normativity does. But in this case it would be odd to blame you for selecting the less-effective toothpaste. But this says nothing about the view I advocate here. All I require is that normative failure seems a necessary condition for blame, not a sufficient condition; the only relevant point is that we should not be blamed for failing to conform to moral obligations that are not normative for us, or fail to determine how we ought to live. This entails that to hold the RA View, one must already have presupposed or established, at the very least, that no moral obligations fail to be normative—that morality is distinctively normatively authoritative.

51. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer.

52. Cf. Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons," in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Notice, however, that this claim is the subject of some dispute in the recent literature on broadly subjectivist theories of reasons. See, in particular, Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

dition I'm tempted to accept, this doesn't vindicate the RA View (and doesn't allow the normativity view to gain traction via the RA View), at least as a Project-satisfying distinguisher of morality. If we accept the crucial assumption here, that is, if we have independent access to first-order facts about the appropriateness of the reactive attitudes, the extent of the overlap between moral failure and such actions appears to be a question that awaits substantive first-order moral investigation. I suppose one might declare, in response to this, that the appropriateness of blame and the reactive attitudes should be "pegged" to the results of a particular domain. There are two ways one might do this: one might either reject the existence of an independent inquiry into blameworthiness, and so on, or one might insist that whatever domain these facts are pegged to should be adjusted in light of a reflective equilibrium about blame, and so forth. But however one draws this connection, if we're going to peg the reactive attitudes to the deliverances of a particular domain, it seems strange to say that we should peg them to the results of a domain (morality) the normativity of which is up for grabs, rather than the domain according to which we ought to live. (Notice that this would of course allow us, if we accept independent access to blameworthy actions, to alter our theories of how to live in light of substantive considered judgments of blameworthiness.) Of course, I don't mean to argue that morality fails to have a distinctive connection to the reactive attitudes. For all I argue here, it certainly does. I only suggest that if in fact it maintains this special connection, that it does must be explained by its special normative authority, and hence the RA View cannot, in turn, explain that authority.

The very same arguments just used to show that the RA View can't explain morality's normative importance seem to me to easily translate into a demonstration that the Motivation View can't either.⁵³ Indeed, at first glance, it seems even more straightforward to believe that the Motivation View is not independent of an assumption of morality's distinctive normative authority. Why, we may ask, does morality in particular form this special connection to the motivational states of rational agents, rather than etiquette? The answer, plausibly, refers to the fact that etiquette is less normatively significant than morality: morality, rather than etiquette, is the domain that most closely models how we ought to live. It would be distinctly odd to hold that morality bears a special connec-

53. This is no objection to moral motivational internalism per se. I merely mean to indicate that an internal connection between a moral (in its narrow sense) judgment and motivation is wildly implausible if we're not already presuming that morality has a special normative status in comparison to other domains. If we judge that etiquette is no less normatively significant than morality, it would appear extremely odd to say that nevertheless morality displays a special motivational role.

tion to the motivational states of rational agents but that, nevertheless, morality has no special normative significance in comparison to other standpoints.

The argument of this section has taken several steps. A recap. Point one: morality's normative authority must be explained by reference to a further distinctive property. Point two: if explained by its distinctive content or grounds, morality's normative authority cannot satisfy The Project. Point three: morality's normative authority cannot be explained by a special connection to reactive attitudes or motivation, because the explanatory arrow goes in the other direction. Morality's normative authority explains any special connection to the reactive attitudes or the motivations of rational agents moral obligations may have. But if that's right, then, point four: morality's normative authority is best explained either by morality's ground or morality's content, neither of which is prior to substantive moral investigation, and hence the Normativity View fails to satisfy The Project. But there's more. Point five: because morality's normative authority explains any connection moral obligations may have to the reactive attitudes or to motivation, and because morality's normative authority is not prior to substantive moral investigation, a purported special connection to the reactive attitudes or the motivations of rational agents is also not prior to substantive first-order inquiry. Thus neither the Normativity View, RA View, nor Motivation View succeed in satisfying The Project.

V. CONCLUSION: MORAL INQUIRY IN LIGHT OF THE PROJECT'S DEMISE

At this point I conclude my argument against The Project. You'll note that it's not rock solid. In principle, other potential distinguishing characteristics could be offered as distinctive of morality, robust, and able to play the essential "gatekeeping" role. But the failure of the accounts on offer—which happen to be the most well-worn accounts of morality's distinctiveness—to satisfy The Project justifies a substantial skepticism that The Project can be satisfied.

However, if The Project does not succeed, this has important implications for the conduct of first-order moral inquiry. To see this, one might consider a potential objection to my rejection of The Project. Recall that The Project is motivated by an attempt to account for the possibility of sensible moral inquiry. According to Warnock and Hooker, we cannot conduct moral inquiry unless and until we know which judgments have moral content. No first-order moral theorizing is possible, in other words, until we have set up a gatekeeper sufficient to distinguish moral judgments (or moral requirements, reasons, and so forth) from judgments of etiquette, prudence, and so on. But if The Project fails, no

such gatekeeper can be found. But if *this* is right, first-order inquiry into the structure and content of morality is doomed. This is good enough for a *reductio* if anything is.

But this argument relies on a dubious assumption. To conduct moral inquiry, we do not require the sort of gatekeeper that Hooker and Warnock, and many others, insist upon. Instead, we should say that whether a considered judgment has moral content or not should be determined by its capacity to survive whatever proper epistemic procedure is appropriate for first-order moral inquiry—such as reflective equilibrium with our substantive considered judgments, including our considered judgments concerning the distinctiveness of the moral domain. If, for instance, I judge that I am morally required to treat the Queen of England with traditional deference, whether or not this judgment has moral content should be determined by whether this judgment is or is not coherent with the remainder of our purportedly moral judgments in reflective equilibrium (if, in fact, this epistemological method is appropriate). If it is, then my judgment has moral content. If it is not (which I suspect), then it does not. None of this renders the content of moral inquiry any less moral. It merely entails that part of what we determine in conducting moral inquiry is just what sort of X (reason, requirement, judgment, and so on) counts as a genuinely moral X, after all.

These implications for moral inquiry seem to imply two additional lessons. First, though my argument against The Project does not, nor was it designed to, offer any particular account of morality's distinctiveness, if The Project fails, this is an important result for future inquiry into morality's distinguishing characteristics. Because morality's distinctiveness can be ascertained only after a substantive inquiry into the moral domain, it would seem that a natural (though perhaps not the only) account of morality's distinctiveness just refers to whatever general theory systematizes the reasons, requirements, and concerns of morality. If, for instance, first-order inquiry yields the result that utilitarianism is the true theory of moral standards, then morality is distinguished, or so it seems to me, by the fact that it is the domain of which utilitarianism is true.

Second, justified skepticism of The Project is extraordinarily significant for the conduct of moral inquiry. As I noted in Section I, many use The Project to reject or limit the consideration of potential accounts of moral demands. But if there is no gatekeeping distinguishing property, then no first-order moral theories, judgments, or reasons should be ruled out simply on the basis of their incompatibility with a purported distinguishing characteristic of morality. One should not judge a moral theory because, for example, this theory is not sufficiently attuned to the reactive attitudes, or because this theory admits of self-regarding duties, or because this theory is not sufficiently welfarist, or because this theory

is incompatible with morality's normative importance, or any other. This is because, though such features of morality can be important considered judgments that help to shape substantive moral inquiry, they cannot and should not constrain it (though they can certainly be participants). Whether, for instance, morality maintains its privileged connection to the reactive attitudes, or whether morality is other-regarding or impartial in concern, and so on, must await determination of whether the true moral theory can accommodate these claims.