Moral Authority, Normative Totality

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INTRODUCTION

There are many normative standpoints—standpoints such as morality, etiquette, aesthetics, epistemic rationality, instrumental rationality, and more. All such standpoints tell us different things that we ought to do. For example, etiquette tells us that we ought to follow the social expectations that bear on us, such as by reciprocating a friendly greeting; aesthetics tells us that we ought to promote and admire beauty; instrumental rationality tells us that we ought to do whatever will maximally satisfy our own ends; and so on. Arguably the most striking thing about normative standpoints, however, is not their sheer diversity, but the fact that only some of them seem to matter.

What does it mean to say that some normative standpoints matter while others don’t? Let’s begin with an example. Consider morality and prudence. Most would say that the fact that an action is morally good (say, because it helps others), or that it is prudentially advisable (say, because it promotes one’s own financial stability), is important in a way that the recommendations of certain other standpoints are not. For a stark contrast, consider the rules and guidelines of games. Avoiding the bunker, for instance, is recommended by the standpoint of golf—yet surely this fails to matter in anything like the way that being recommended by morality or prudence does. For a yet more extreme example, we might simply make up a normative standpoint and fill it with all kinds of ridiculous norms. Suppose that the standpoint of purplism recommends maximizing the number of things that are purple; would such a standpoint have anything close to the authority that standpoints like morality and prudence seem to have? The overwhelmingly intuitive answer, at least, is that it wouldn’t.

While this idea of normative authority thus seems very intuitive, it remains less than obvious just what this authority is. That, then, is one of the two main questions this book takes up: What is it for a normative standpoint to have authority? The other main question, and one that lies even closer to the
heart of this book, is the question of which normative standpoints have authority. My answer to this latter question is that the only standpoint with authority, if any standpoints have authority at all, is morality. In other words, this view, which I call moral totalism (or simply totalism for short), holds that whatever normative authority there is, is moral authority. To be clear, I leave it open whether any normative standpoint has authority at all; for all I argue in this book, it could be that normative nihilism is true, in which case no normative standpoint would have authority. We might imagine my position as a disjunction, then: Either (1) nothing matters at all, or (2) some things do matter, and the way in which they matter is entirely moral.

Here is how this book will proceed. First, in chapter one, I offer an account of normative authority that appeals to normativity simpliciter (e.g., ought simpliciter, reasons simpliciter, etc.). Then, having explained what I have in mind by normative authority, the rest of the chapter offers an account of moral authority. My account of moral authority centers on our moral practices—that is, our ordinary, pre-theoretical moral thought, discourse, behavior, and phenomenology. In particular, the three moral practices that I focus on are blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives. To the extent that it is fitting to exercise these moral practices in relation to a group of norms (e.g., by blaming those who violate them without excuse), those norms have at least one kind of authority, namely moral authority.

In the wake of chapter one’s discussion of normative authority and of moral authority, I argue in chapter two that all normative authority is in fact moral authority. I offer two arguments for this view (i.e., moral totalism), both of which stem from a phenomenon I call moral pervasiveness. In brief, moral pervasiveness is the fact that necessarily, anything that matters at all, matters at least to some extent morally. In this way, moral authority pervades whatever other kinds of authority there might be. I spend most of the chapter arguing that moral pervasiveness is a real phenomenon. In particular, I consider the various salient non-moral standpoints, arguing of each one that (1) it either lacks authority or (2) insofar
as it has any authority, its authority is at least partly moral. For example, I argue that one’s own well-being is morally valuable, and that on this basis the authority of prudence is at least partly moral. Then, at the end of this first argument, I propose that moral pervasiveness is best explained by moral totalism: The reason why everything that matters, matters morally, is that moral mattering is the only kind of mattering there is.

The second argument in chapter two holds that moral pervasiveness is itself a challenge to the intelligibility of non-moral kinds of authority. Consider, after all, that the traditional way of distinguishing moral from non-moral kinds of authority is to appeal to their respective content: Moral authority has to do with the reasons we have to help others, aesthetic authority has to do with the reasons we have to promote and admire beauty, prudential authority has to do with the reasons we have to further our own well-being, and so on. Yet moral pervasiveness makes this strategy untenable. When moral authority pervades every other kind of content that matters, no such content will be distinctively non-moral. To distinguish between moral and non-moral kinds of authority, then, requires finding some basis other than content. As I go on to argue, however, no such alternative way of distinguishing between moral and non-moral kinds of authority seems to work, either. In the end, moral pervasiveness makes it unclear just what a distinctively non-moral kind of authority could amount to, and in that way further supports the conclusion that all normative authority is moral authority.

In chapter three, I consider some objections to moral totalism. Specifically, I respond to (1) an appeal to a case in which the verdict of a non-moral standpoint seems to outweigh that of morality, (2) the claim that in some cases an action’s minor immorality is itself a reason to perform it, (3) the worry that totalism is too demanding and that it leaves no room for partiality to one’s own projects and relationships, and (4) the claim that totalism leaves us unable to account for the supererogatory. Of course, these are far from being the only objections to totalism. Particularly since totalism is a radical view, the kind of view that naturally raises many objections, here I cannot respond to all of them. Still, to
the extent that the above objections fail, that provides at least some (indirect) support to the case for totalism.
CHAPTER 1: WHAT NORMATIVE AUTHORITY AND MORAL AUTHORITY ARE

My primary claim in this work is that all normative authority is moral authority. Before I defend this claim, however, I’ll prepare the way with some more general points about normative authority and morality. In this chapter I’ll first clarify what I mean by “morality” and by “normative authority.” I’ll then argue that the best way of understanding normative authority is to appeal to some kind of normativity simpliciter, such as ought simpliciter. Next, I’ll describe what moral authority looks like, or what it would look like—that is, the ways in which, if morality has authority, such authority is reflected (e.g., by justifying guilt).

I. Morality and Normative Authority

Let’s begin, then, with what I mean by “morality.” A natural starting point, it might seem, would be simply to provide a definition of “morality.” Unfortunately, this I cannot do; “morality” is a notoriously difficult term to define. Fortunately, our inability to define “morality” does not suggest that we have nothing to say about what we mean by it. Even without a definition of “morality,” we might still be able to offer an informative characterization of it. And, indeed, I believe that we can; such a characterization would appeal to our ordinary, pre-theoretical moral thought, discourse, behavior, and

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1 Why not define morality in terms of a “moral point of view”—that is, in terms of the kind of content morality is concerned with, such as helping others? I’ll argue against such an approach in chapter 2, section 2.

2 What might it mean to offer an informative characterization of something we cannot define? Here it might help to consider some examples. Huemer (2005: 251) points out that he cannot define “table.” In this Huemer and I are alike. Yet surely we can say many informative things about tables, such as what they’re typically made of, how they’re used, what some paradigm examples of them are, and so on.
phenomenology—collectively, our *moral practices*. Blame, for example, is one of our moral practices. And one way of characterizing moral wrongness is in terms of blame: An action is morally wrong iff, were someone to perform it without an excuse, it would be fitting to blame him for doing so.\(^3\) Much of the rest of this chapter will discuss our moral practices, including blame, at greater length; I believe that the result of the discussion will be a clearer picture of the kind of thing morality is and of how normative authority is or would be reflected therein. For now, suffice it to say that I’m using “morality” in what appears to be its ordinary, commonsense usage. For example, a paradigm case of a moral norm would be to help others for their own sake.

I turn now to what I mean by “normative authority.” I believe that the notion is best introduced through an example. Consider an agent who, having just come across a hungry stray cat, is deliberating about whether to take it in. As she considers the merits of adopting the cat, there are multiple normative standpoints that she might appeal to. For example, she considers that adopting the cat is the moral thing to do. After all, it would make the cat’s life much better—and, let’s suppose, without placing any undue burden on her, the agent. She then considers that adopting the cat would be not only morally right, but prudentially well-advised. Just imagine what all her cat-loving friends will think when she posts the story and pictures on social media; her status within her social group will gain a substantial boost. Convinced that she should do what’s recommended by both morality and prudence, she picks up the cat.

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\(^3\) Of course, one might worry that there’s some circularity here, as it is tempting—and perhaps inevitable—to characterize blame in terms of moral wrongness. If we’re asked to distinguish between blame and mere criticism, we’re apt to say that we blame only what is morally wrong. To the extent that there is circularity here, however, it’s not obviously problematic. When characterizing fundamental moral notions, such as rightness, wrongness, and blame, we might well be bound to encounter a bit of circularity. (In this way, morality would be like modality; when asked, say, what it is for a thing to be possible, we reply that it’s for it not to be necessary that that thing not exist. Modal terms can be defined only by using other modal terms. Yet this does not seem to undermine the informativeness of modal terms.) While the web of fundamental moral notions seems marked by a degree of circularity, what matters more is that each node in the web nevertheless intuitively has some content of its own that can help shed light on it and on the other nodes in the web. For example, part of the content associated with blame is that blame is a way of treating something with seriousness—and this, as I’ll discuss in more detail later in the chapter, suggests that moral wrongness is something we take seriously. Skorupski (2007: 249) makes a similar point about using blameworthiness to help characterize moral wrongness.
and starts walking home. Suddenly, however, she remembers that it’s Wednesday, and it occurs to her that there’s a coherent normative standpoint—call it Martian etiquette—that holds that one ought not to save stray cats on Wednesdays. Now she feels torn; what should she do?

Most of us, I think, would say that she ought to heed morality and prudence, and to pay Martian etiquette no mind. That an action is morally right, that an action is prudentially well-advised—surely, or at least plausibly, these considerations matter. That Martian etiquette holds an action to be gauche? Surely this doesn’t matter. The broader lesson here is that, while myriad normative standpoints will offer a verdict on what an agent ought to do, not all normative standpoints in fact have any bearing on what the agent ought to do. Some normative standpoints are more important than others; only some standpoints have normative authority.

Above I said that “not all normative standpoints in fact have any bearing on what the agent ought to do.” But just what kind of “ought” is this? Certainly not an “ought” that is bound to any particular normative standpoint, such as etiquette. (Trivially, etiquette bears on what one ought-in-terms-of-etiquette to do.) What we have here, rather, seems to be an “ought” that transcends the more particular normative standpoints. It’s as if one were to say, “Sure, I know that morally, I ought to X; prudentially, I ought to Y; legally, I ought to Z; and so on. But what ought I to do in light of everything? Is there anything I just plain ought to do here?” The “ought” in question, it seems, is ought simpliciter.

What my above suggestion amounts to, then, is that appealing to ought simpliciter allows us to make sense of the question of which normative standpoints have authority. For example, let’s return to the

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4 It might seem surprising for me to suggest that both morality and prudence matter, given my view that only morality has normative authority. However, there is in fact no tension here, since, as I’ll argue in the next chapter (section III.A), the way in which prudence matters is wholly moral; prudential reasons are a subset of moral reasons.

5 We might also say, though perhaps with a bit of awkwardness, that certain things in the world have normative authority (e.g., the well-being of sentient creatures), whereas other things don’t (e.g., complying with Martian etiquette).

6 Quinn (1993: 212) similarly understands authority in terms of ought simpliciter.
case of the agent deciding whether to save the stray cat. We might imagine the agent saying the following:

Morally and prudentially, I ought to save the cat, but in terms of Martian etiquette, I ought not to save the cat. Now, is there anything I just plain ought to do here? It seems that there is. After all, prudence and morality matter; they’re the kind of standpoint whose verdicts factor in to what one just plain ought to do. Martian etiquette, on the other hand, does not matter; its verdicts do not help determine what one just plain ought to do. Thus, since prudence and morality seem to be the only standpoints here that bear on what I just plain ought to do, and since they both recommend that I save the cat, it turns out I just plain ought to save the cat.

Not everyone, however, agrees that there is such a thing as ought simpliciter. Some hold that, while there is a moral ought, a prudential ought, a legal ought, and so on, there is nothing beyond that, no overarching ought that is to be arrived at in light of all the other, more particular oughts. And if that’s right, it seems that there is no way to make sense of authority. Authority, after all, is supposed to be a property that sets some oughts apart from others, a property that gives some oughts a special status. If, at the end of the day, there really is nothing over and above the myriad particular oughts—nothing that marks some oughts as just plain more important than others—then it is difficult to see how we could account for authority.

Much turns, then, on whether there is a case to be made for ought simpliciter. Certainly one point in favor of ought simpliciter is its intuitive plausibility. When faced with the conflicting recommendations of the myriad normative standpoints, most of us are inclined to think that it makes sense to ask, “What, in light of everything, ought I to do?” We don’t take ourselves to be facing a mere arbitrary choice of which normative standpoint to follow. It’s not as if the person who follows Martian etiquette over morality and prudence is criticizable only in a trivial way (i.e., by pointing out that morally and prudentially, she ought to follow morality and prudence), whereas the person who favors prudence and morality over Martian etiquette is equally criticizable, yet only in just as trivial a way (i.e., by

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7 Darwall (1997: 699) and Radzik (2000: 458) raise a similar point.
pointing out that according to the norms of Martian etiquette, she ought to follow Martian etiquette).

Such a barren normative landscape as this is tantamount to normative nihilism.

Why, then, are some drawn to ought simpliciter skepticism? Perhaps the most influential attack on ought simpliciter comes from David Copp (1997). Copp’s argument might be put as follows: If there is such a thing as ought simpliciter, then it is the ought that is issued by the most important normative standpoint—a standpoint that we might, with Copp, call “Reason-as-such,” or simply R (1997: 87). But for something (including R) to be “most important,” it must be judged as such by some normative standpoint. Call this further normative standpoint S. Now, either S is identical to R, or it is not. If S is identical to R, then R is not the most important standpoint—for R would be “most important” only in a trivial sense, or according to its own standards, just as any normative standpoint whatsoever might use its own standards to judge itself the most important. And if S is not identical to R, then R is still not the most important standpoint—for it would be S, in having the power to definitively rank R and all the other standpoints, that comes out as more important. It is on this basis that Copp finds incoherent the idea of a most important normative standpoint, along with the corresponding idea of ought simpliciter (1997: 101-103).

Copp’s argument has come to face some pressing challenges in the literature. Linda Radzik (2000), in particular, questions why it’s unacceptable for R and S (above) to be the same standpoint. To be sure, for R to thus judge itself the most important standpoint would be circular. Yet it’s not obvious that this is a vicious circularity. As Radzik points out, “We must keep in mind that our topic is the justification of norms and standards, and that justification and logical proof are not the same thing. Circularity is indeed vicious in a proof, but it is not always vicious in a justification” (2000: 459). As an example of an unproblematically self-justifying norm, Radzik considers “A self-evidently true belief is epistemically justified” (Ibid.). The justification for such a norm—namely, that it is self-evidently true—is

8 For a similar point, see McLeod (2001: 286).
adverted to in the norm itself, yet this does not seem to undermine the norm’s justification. More broadly, Radzik suggests that being self-justifying, far from being a problem for a candidate most important normative standpoint, is in fact a necessary condition of its adequacy (2000: 460).9

The criticisms that Radzik and others have brought forth on Copp’s argument seem to me well placed. Copp’s, however, is not the only attempt to take down ought simpliciter.10 A more recent argument for ought simpliciter skepticism, one that has not yet amassed a critical literature, comes from Derek Baker (2018). Baker’s central claim is that there is no coherent concept of ought simpliciter to be found. As part of his case, Baker claims that the concept of ought simpliciter has no theoretical or practical utility.11 “Ought simpliciter” appears to be merely a philosopher’s term of art that is unmoored from any familiar theoretical notion (e.g., explanation). When we try to specify the meaning of “ought simpliciter,” all we have at our disposal are “vague but evocative phrases (‘normative force, what you really ought to do’) that gesture at it” (Baker 2018: 246). Baker (Ibid.) continues:

More importantly, the notion lacks theoretical utility. There is, to put it simply, no theoretical problem that the ought simpliciter solves, or helps us to characterize more perspicuously. Consider our initial case [viz., the ring of Gyges, from Plato’s Republic]. Gyges ought self-interestedly to kill the king, and he ought morally to refrain. This is how the world is. There is no mystery here cowering out for explanation.

Nor does ought simpliciter have any practical utility. It’s not as if we need to appeal to ought simpliciter to be able to act. Given conflicts between the verdicts of the various normative standpoints, we may simply choose to act based on which normative standpoints we feel to be most important to us. For example, in a conflict between morality and etiquette, someone who cares more about morality will be inclined to do what morality recommends, while someone who cares more about etiquette will be

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9 For further criticism of Copp’s argument, see McLeod (2001: 286-287).

10 See Finlay (2007: 152-154) and Tiffany (2007) for additional defenses of ought simpliciter skepticism, defenses I lack the space to discuss here.

11 This part of Baker’s argument in fact comes relatively late in his paper. For present purposes, however, I find it most convenient to begin here.
inclined to do what etiquette recommends—and that’s that. And if someone cares equally about morality and etiquette? Then they can simply choose arbitrarily. None of this presents any practical problem that requires us to posit an ought *simpliciter* in response (Baker 2018: 247).

There’s more to Baker’s case against ought *simpliciter* than this. Still, before we examine the rest of Baker’s argument, let’s see whether what he’s claimed so far withstands scrutiny. First, is it true that ought *simpliciter* fails to connect to any familiar theoretical notion? I do not believe that it is. Consider the notion of mattering. It’s a perfectly natural thing to say, for example, that morality matters more than etiquette—no philosophers’ terms of art here. How do we interpret such a proposition? One promising way is by appealing to ought *simpliciter*. Morality, the thought goes, matters more than etiquette in the following way: The verdicts of morality are coextensive with what we ought *simpliciter* to do, whereas those of etiquette are not coextensive with what we ought *simpliciter* to do. It is in this way that morality might be understood as mattering more than etiquette. So it is false that ought *simpliciter* fails to link up with any familiar theoretical notions.

What about Baker’s broader claim that ought *simpliciter* has no theoretical utility? Here, too, Baker’s claim does not hold up to scrutiny. For it seems to be an important feature of our normative life that, when faced with the conflicting verdicts of the myriad normative standpoints, we are at least sometimes non-trivially justified in following some standpoints’ verdicts over others’. To modify an example given earlier: It’s not as if the person who favors prudence over Martian etiquette is justified only in a trivial way (viz., that prudentially, she ought to favor prudence), whereas the person who follows Martian etiquette over prudence is equally justified (and in just as trivial a way—viz., that according to the norms of Martian etiquette, she ought to favor Martian etiquette). There seems to be something that makes it possible to *non-arbitrarily* choose between following the verdicts of conflicting normative standpoints. And that something, one might think, is ought *simpliciter*. For instance, in the above example, we might suppose that the verdict of prudence corresponds to what one ought
simpliciter to do, whereas the verdict of Martian etiquette fails to so correspond, and that this is what constitutes one’s non-trivial justification for favoring prudence over Martian etiquette here. In this way, ought simpliciter explains an important feature of our normative life; thus, it cannot be said that ought simpliciter has no theoretical utility.

It is for a similar reason that ought simpliciter, pace Baker, has practical utility as well. It’s not simply that, as a matter of fact, we are able to non-arbitrarily choose between following the verdicts of conflicting standpoints. Beyond this, it’s that we want our choices here not to be arbitrary. A normative landscape in which the only justification for favoring some standpoints over others is merely trivial—such a landscape is apt to strike most of us as empty, alien, a mockery of the seriousness with which we hold our deepest normative commitments. In accounting for why we need not be resigned to a fundamental arbitrariness here, ought simpliciter preserves something dear to us.12

We see, then, that ought simpliciter has significant theoretical and practical utility. So why is Baker at pains to reject ought simpliciter? Let’s look now at the core of his argument. The central concern behind Baker’s argument is this: To have a satisfactory account of ought simpliciter, we must point out some feature of ought simpliciter that makes it special, that makes it more important than other oughts. After all, the whole point of ought simpliciter is supposed to be that it resolves conflicts between other, more particular oughts. Whatever our notion of ought simpliciter is, we had better make sure that it doesn’t turn out to be just another ought. Yet this proves to be a difficult trap to avoid. Baker

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12 Interestingly, at times Baker himself seems to be aware of just how much is at stake in rejecting ought simpliciter. In the striking final passage, he notes:

[A rejection of the ought simpliciter] would mean, admittedly, a rejection of the practicality of philosophy. There is no absolute perspective from which different kinds of considerations can be weighed. Individual agents may have their deliberative standards for measuring one kind of consideration against another, but these standards are themselves arbitrary, in the sense that they are simply one more standard among many…. We can still ask questions about morality’s naturalistic bona fides and the relation between morality and rationality. But there is one question to which we as philosophers have no special answer, and that’s “So what?” (Baker 2018: 251).
argues that, on some natural and well-known accounts of ought *simpliciter*, ought *simpliciter* turns out to be just another ought.

For example, some think that ought *simpliciter* is the ought that settles what to do. But if we interpret this as the “ought that settles what one ought to do,” then the problem is simple: “[W]e have failed to identify anything special about the ought *simpliciter*. It is a clear triviality that ought in any sense settles what one ought in that sense to do” (Baker 2018: 236). That ought *simpliciter* settles what one ought (*simpliciter*) to do is no more philosophically interesting than that the prudential ought settles what one ought prudentially to do, that the moral ought settles what one ought morally to do, and so on. Under such an account of ought *simpliciter*, an agent facing a conflict between, say, morality and prudence would find ought *simpliciter* utterly unhelpful. If ought *simpliciter* favored acting morally, there would still be a conflict between ought *simpliciter* and the prudential ought—and why should the agent favor ought *simpliciter* over the prudential ought? Likewise, if ought *simpliciter* favored acting prudentially, there would still be a conflict between ought *simpliciter* and the moral ought—and why should the agent favor ought *simpliciter* over the moral ought? Rather than resolving anything, ought *simpliciter* seems to have simply introduced a further conflict.

Now, there are ways of avoiding the trap of turning ought *simpliciter* into just another ought. For instance, we might say that only ought *simpliciter* has “normative force,” or that only ought *simpliciter* is “robustly normative,” or that only ought *simpliciter* “tells you what you really ought to do” (Baker 2018: 234). But the problem here, Baker suggests, is that such accounts are intolerably vague and

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13 Baker cites Wedgwood (2007: 25) and Joyce (2001: 50) as examples of philosophers who hold this view. Jamie Dreier (personal communication) also expresses sympathy for this view.

14 And what if we interpret “the ought that settles what to do” as “the ought that settles what one will do”? Baker (2018: 236) charges that this interpretation merely changes the subject. After all, ought *simpliciter* is supposed to play the important normative role of settling conflicts between other, more particular oughts. Yet if ought *simpliciter* simply tells one what one will do, then there would seem to be nothing particularly normative about ought *simpliciter*. Ought *simpliciter* would be a matter of what one is motivated to do, not what one ought to do.
metaphorical (Ibid.). In the end, there seems to be no satisfying way of saying just what ought *simpliciter* is supposed to amount to. The concept of ought *simpliciter*, Baker concludes, is incoherent.15

I’ll concede that proponents of ought *simpliciter* owe their interlocutors an explanation of how ought *simpliciter* is special, and that they should offer this explanation without appealing to mere metaphors or other vague talk.16 Unlike Baker, however, I believe that this challenge can be answered. Here, in my view, is what makes ought *simpliciter* special: It is the only ought there is.17,18 The problem with Baker’s argument is that it assumes that there are multiple distinct and conflicting oughts—at a minimum, the moral ought and the prudential ought, though presumably also the legal ought, the ought of etiquette, and many others—all nestled alongside one another in a kind of salad, as it were. We’re then to imagine adding ought *simpliciter* as an additional ingredient, and then ask ourselves why this new ingredient is any more important than the others. On a view like this, it is indeed difficult to see what could be so special about ought *simpliciter*. Yet that is the wrong way to think of the salad. Rather

15 Strictly speaking, Baker allows that there is one coherent proposal for a concept of ought *simpliciter*: the ought that results from combining all of one’s reasons. Baker (2018: 235) argues, however, that this view of ought *simpliciter* “comes with highly counterintuitive normative commitments” and that “[t]hese commitments are distasteful enough that it is reasonable to conclude that we have failed to characterize a concept of the ought *simpliciter* that we currently use or could learn to use.” Since “the ought that results from combining all of one’s reasons” is not how I propose we understand ought *simpliciter*, I won’t go into the details of Baker’s argument here.

16 I should be clear, though, that this concession is largely for the sake of argument. I think that even if we had to say that the way in which ought *simpliciter* resolves conflicts between other oughts is primitive and inexplicable, this would still be preferable to the might-as-well-be-normative-nihilism that Baker leaves us with. See footnote 12.

17 This will immediately raise some questions, not the least of which is how I can say this while maintaining that there are moral oughts. The answer is that, on my view, the moral ought is metaphysically identical with ought *simpliciter*. To be sure, the two are not conceptually identical; it makes sense, for example, to ask whether every moral ought is an ought *simpliciter*. More precisely, whereas the moral ought is conceptually distinguished by its connection to the moral practices (e.g., blame) that I’ll discuss later in this chapter, ought *simpliciter* is not conceptually distinguished in this way. Ought *simpliciter*, it seems, is either conceptually primitive or analyzable only in terms of some other normative entity *simpliciter* (e.g., reasons *simpliciter*); I do not take a stand on which of these is the case. Still, despite the conceptual distinction between the moral ought and ought *simpliciter*, it turns out that every moral ought is, in fact, an ought *simpliciter*, and *vice versa*. The bulk of my case for this view will come in chapter two, where I’ll argue that all normative authority is moral authority.

than imagining a salad full of competing oughts, we should imagine a salad full of competing ought-claims—and not just claims about what we ought to do in some sense, but claims about what we ought *simpliciter* to do. The special contribution of ought *simpliciter* is to make some of these claims true, others false. It is in this way that ought *simpliciter* adjudicates between competing ought-claims (and the standpoints that issue them), rather than being “just another ought.”  

Clearly, there’s a good deal to unpack here. Let’s consider some examples. Here are some typical-sounding normative propositions, followed by how they are to be interpreted on my view:

a. “Prudentially, you ought to save your money.” | “According to prudence, you ought *(simpliciter)* to save your money.”

b. “You morally ought to give to charity.” | “According to morality, you ought *(simpliciter)* to give to charity.”

c. “Rationally, you ought to believe that you exist.” | “According to the standpoint of (epistemic) rationality, you ought *(simpliciter)* to believe that you exist.”

With the proliferation of the various standpoints and their competing ought-(*simpliciter*)-claims, the question simply becomes which ought-(*simpliciter*)-claims are true. For instance, working with the first of the two above examples, suppose it turns out that in a certain case we ought *simpliciter* to give to charity. Prudence, in holding that we ought *simpliciter* to save the money rather than giving it to charity, would then be issuing a false ought-(*simpliciter*)-claim, whereas morality, in holding that we ought *simpliciter* to give the money to charity, would be issuing the true ought-(*simpliciter*)-claim. It is on this basis that we could, in such a case, be (nontrivially) justified in following morality over prudence; our choosing to follow morality over prudence would not have to be arbitrary.

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19 For a similar view—including another food-based analogy—see Wodak (2018: secs. 3-5).

20 Darwall (1997: 699) makes a helpful point related to this example: “‘Oughts’ that seem binding to us from the moral point of view, present themselves (from that point of view) as binding nonrelatively, not just as binding relative to that perspective.”
To be sure, this view allows that we can still intelligibly, and even correctly, speak in terms of other kinds of oughts. For example, suppose that we ought *simpliciter* to maintain a balanced diet. We would be right to call this a prudential ought. But it’s not as if we’d thereby be suggesting that there is a distinct kind of ought, the prudential ought, that is to be set alongside (and possibly compete with) ought *simpliciter*. Rather, a prudential ought is simply an ought *simpliciter* that has to do with preserving or furthering one’s own well-being.\(^{21}\) The situation is analogous for all other ought-kinds as well; to give another example, an ought of etiquette is simply an instance of ought *simpliciter* that has to do with following the customs and social expectations that bear on one. On the view I’m proposing, all ought-kinds—not to be confused with kinds of ought-claims—are metaphysically identical with ought *simpliciter*.

This view avoids Baker’s worries about vagueness, overreliance on metaphor, and making ought *simpliciter* “just another ought.” Still, there remains the question of what positive reason we have to accept the view. The answer, I think, is precisely that the view provides us with a coherent conception of ought *simpliciter*. As discussed above, ought *simpliciter* has great theoretical and practical utility: It explains how we can be nontrivially justified in following some standpoints’ verdicts over others’, and it thereby allows us a way out of the pervasive arbitrariness that would otherwise infect our normative life. To provide a coherent account of ought *simpliciter* is, thus, a matter of immense importance; that my view appears to provide such an account is its principal advantage. Moreover, my view has the advantage of parsimony. The rival view here—that which posits many, perhaps even infinitely many, ought-kinds—is less parsimonious than my view, which posits, at bottom, only one ought-kind. Of course, my view allows that there are many (indeed, infinitely many) kinds of ought-claims. But that is no blow to parsimony; kinds of ought-claims are ontologically cheap in a way that kinds of ought are not.

\(^{21}\) Scheffler (2007: 130) makes a similar point.
But might there be problems with the view that the ought *simpliciter* is the only ought? Baker believes so. Consider a statement like “Instead of pushing eastward into Russia, Hitler ought to have sent the Wehrmacht south to seize the Romanian oil fields” (Baker 2018: 250). If indeed ought *simpliciter* is the only ought, then presumably the “ought” in such a statement refers to ought *simpliciter*. Someone who sincerely uttered the above statement, then, would be implying himself to be a Nazi. But surely this isn’t the right verdict. Ordinary people—people without bizarre or monstrous normative commitments—can perfectly well say things like “Instead of pushing eastward into Russia, Hitler ought to have sent the Wehrmacht south to seize the Romanian oil-fields.” To account for this, we must allow that there are relativized kinds of ought (e.g., the prudential ought), kinds of ought distinct from ought *simpliciter*, and that it is these relativized kinds of ought that people are referring to when they utter statements like the above.

There is, however, nothing here that my view cannot account for. My view could simply interpret the above statement as follows: “According to the standpoint of military strategy, Hitler ought *(simpliciter)* to have sent the Wehrmacht south to seize the Romanian oil-fields.” And it’s not at all odd to think that an ordinary person could mean this, nor that he would use an elliptical statement to express it. After all, people sometimes talk about military strategy—and when they do, there’s no need to preface all their statements with “According to the standpoint of military strategy...” That they have in mind the standpoint of military strategy can be inferred from the context. More generally, across conversational contexts there will be a variety of salient standpoints, and it is the ought-(*simpliciter*)-claims of these standpoints that people can have in mind when evaluating others’ actions. We need not posit different kinds of ought, but only different standpoints on which actions ought *simpliciter* to be done.

It seems to me, then, that Baker’s objections fail to undermine ought *simpliciter*. But there remain other objections worth considering. One of them is this: While it’s plausible that certain
normative standpoints purport to tell us what we ought *simpliciter* to do—morality and prudence come to mind—with other normative standpoints, this is much less plausible. Consider, for example, the rules and guidelines of chess. When these tell me that I ought to castle early, are they telling me (probably falsely) what I ought *simpliciter* to do? Does the standpoint of chess really purport to reveal what is of ultimate importance for me to do? Surely, the thought goes, the standpoint of chess is not in the business of offering such grandiose verdicts.

We should be careful, however, of assuming that such verdicts are more grandiose than they in fact are. It could very well be that the ought-*simpliciter*-claims of chess (along with those of games more broadly) are conditional. For instance, rather than saying, “One ought (*simpliciter*) to castle early,” the standpoint of chess could simply be saying, “If one is playing chess, then one ought (*simpliciter*) to castle early.” And the antecedent “If one is playing chess” could likewise preface all the other ought-*simpliciter*-claims that the standpoint of chess makes. This matters because it would entail that the standpoint of chess, contrary to what we might have imagined from the above objection, is not telling people going about their everyday lives that they should be playing chess (and that, while doing so, they should castle early); rather, its verdicts would extend only to those already playing chess. There would be no suggestion, then, that what ultimately matters is that one checkmate one’s opponent before getting checkmated oneself; when it comes to people who aren’t playing chess, the standpoint of chess would leave it entirely open what might or might not matter.

Some might say that there’s still something suspect here—for, when it comes to those who *are* playing chess, would the standpoint of chess not, on my view, be offering verdicts on what ultimately matters (in particular, that one should checkmate one’s opponent before getting checkmated oneself)? And even when the scope is limited to people who are playing chess, one might think that the standpoint of chess is not in the business of offering verdicts on what ultimately matters. However, it doesn’t seem so implausible to me to think that this could be the case. To see why, imagine that I’m
playing a game of chess, and that I get an opportunity to checkmate my opponent. The standpoint of chess would then counsel me to do so. But now imagine that a criminal mastermind has informed me that if I win this game of chess, he’ll kill a group of hostages. Would this change the standpoint of chess’s verdict? Surely it would not; the standpoint of chess would continue to counsel me to checkmate my opponent. While there would be other standpoints (particularly morality) counseling me to do otherwise, the standpoint of chess would remain concerned purely with chess strategy.

If there’s any doubt about this, consider that following morality and throwing the match—which almost everyone would agree is more important than winning the match—nevertheless requires me to play a bad chess game, to adopt poor chess strategy, and so on. That these normative notions are still in play here suggests that the standpoint of chess is continuing to counsel me to win the game. But then, if indeed the standpoint of chess tells me that I ought to win the game, and continues to tell me this even when others’ lives are at stake, it seems that the verdicts of the standpoint of chess are verdicts on what ultimately matters after all. It’s simply that they’re often or always mistaken verdicts. (Surely this is no surprise; after all, almost no one believes that the standpoint of chess has authority. And we certainly don’t need to take the standpoint of chess’s verdicts seriously, qua verdicts on what ultimately matters, to be able to enjoy a game of chess.)

Of course, the above points might seem specific to chess, whereas the original worry—namely, that some standpoints are not plausibly construed as telling us what we ought simpliciter to do—was more general. Even if the above points defuse the worry when applied to chess, what might I say about, for example, the law? When the law tells me that I ought, say, to refrain from jaywalking, it doesn’t seem to be averting to an ought simpliciter. Intuitively, the law simply isn’t in the business of telling me what is of ultimate importance for me to do.

I agree that the appearances don’t favor the view that the law tells us (surely in many cases falsely) what we ought simpliciter to do. When we examine things more closely, however, I believe we
find that the alternative views are even less plausible. Insofar as the law is in the business of telling us what we ought to do at all, it must be telling us what we ought to do in some sense. More precisely, it must be telling us what we ought simpliciter to do or what we ought to do in some more particular sense. Supposing, then, that the law doesn’t tell us what we ought simpliciter to do, the question is which of the more particular senses of “ought” the law makes use of. Clearly the answer is not the moral ought, the prudential ought, the epistemic ought, and so on; it’s not as if the law itself is delivering verdicts on what we morally, prudentially, or epistemically ought to do. The only ought that has even an initial hope of being the right one here, it seems, is the legal ought: The law tells us what we legally ought to do.

Yet this proposal, natural as it might at first seem, runs into a problem of its own. The problem is that “legally” just seems to mean “according to the law.” For example, “She is legally blind,” can be translated to “She is blind according to (the standards set forth in) the law.” Thus, in statements of the form “According to the law, one legally ought to Φ,” the “legally” is redundant. Worse, if indeed the law is telling us that we legally ought to Φ, then the law’s verdicts become self-referential in a highly implausible fashion: Rather than simply telling us that we ought to Φ, the law is telling us that it’s telling us that we ought to Φ. So even the legal ought, in the end, does not appear to be the ought that the law is adverting to. And since it seems equally clear the law is not adverting to any of the other more particular oughts, the only option left is ought simpliciter. More broadly, while I’ve discussed only chess and the law here, I hope that this brief discussion nevertheless shows that the present worry—namely,

22 There’s room for doubt about this. One might think that rather than telling us what we ought to do, the law simply tells us what we must do. Here, however, for the sake of argument, I’ll assume that the law deals (at least) in oughts.

23 Thomson (2008: 170) makes a structurally similar point, though she uses morality as an illustration rather than the law.
that some standpoints are not plausibly construed as telling us what we ought *simpliciter* to do—is more
difficult to motivate than it might seem.

A further objection to my view of ought *simpliciter* has to do with how we *weigh* competing
ought-claims when deliberating. Suppose, for instance, that legally I ought to drive within the speed
limit, but that prudentially I ought to speed a little. On my view, the law and prudence are both false
normative standpoints. I mean this not, of course, in the sense of “not really normative standpoints,”
but simply in the sense that each delivers some false verdicts. And, just as any conjunction, no matter
how large, with even a single false conjunct is itself false, so, too, any normative standpoint with even
one false verdict is itself false. But then, if both the law and prudence are false normative standpoints on
my view, what am I doing when I weigh the legal and the prudential ought-claims here?

Here’s my view of what’s going on in cases like this. In most situations, there will be a variety of
considerations that bear on what one ought *simpliciter* to do. For instance, the fact that something is in
one’s own interest is an ought- *simpliciter*-making feature; other things equal, it makes it the case that
one ought *simpliciter* to do that thing. (The ought *simpliciter* in such a case would take the form of a
prudential ought.) But of course, other things aren’t always equal; sometimes other considerations will
outweigh one’s own interest. But it’s not as if this outweighing suggests that there’s a distinct ought,
namely the prudential ought, that is being outweighed by another distinct ought. Rather, it’s simply that
the ought-*simpliciter*-claim of prudence is false in such a case, given that competing considerations *ex
hypothesi* matter more here than my own well-being. The *kind* of importance or mattering is the same
for each consideration at work; some considerations just have more of it than others. We might capture
the kind of importance or mattering at work here by appealing to goodness *simpliciter*. That is, when I

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24 For a false verdict by the law, consider a case in which the law tells me that I ought not to help a runaway slave
escape. For a false verdict by prudence, consider a case in which I could save a billion distant lives, but in which
doing so would require undergoing some minor inconvenience. With the right stipulations (e.g., that I won’t be
weighed down by guilt if I choose not to save the lives), prudence would tell me (surely falsely) that I ought to
refrain from saving the lives, given the minor inconvenience that would be involved.
weigh the conflicting verdicts of different standpoints, I may be understood as weighing the goodness *simpliciter* of the respective considerations that those standpoints center on. For example, in a conflict between prudence and the law, I would weigh the goodness *simpliciter* of my own interest against the goodness *simpliciter* of following the law. Were I to judge that the goodness *simpliciter* of acting in my own interest is in this case greater (or perhaps, greater by enough of a margin) than that of following the law, then I would judge that I ought *simpliciter* to act in my own interest in this case rather than follow the law. There doesn’t seem to me to be anything odd about weighing various considerations against one another in this way.

Let’s now consider a final objection to ought *simpliciter*, an objection stemming from Kratzerian linguistics. In brief, the objection is that Angelika Kratzer’s (1977) influential treatment of modal auxiliary verbs shows that all occurrences of “ought” refer to some particular ought (e.g., the prudential ought, the ought of etiquette, etc.), rather than ought *simpliciter*. On the Kratzerian view, “ought” has a parameter, and until this parameter is filled (generally from conversational context), no complete relation is expressed. This parameter is called an ordering source (so called because it orders possible worlds). Etiquette, morality, the law, and other normative standpoints provide ordering sources.

Consider, for example, the statement “You ought to drive within the speed limit.” Under the most natural interpretation, the “ought” in this statement refers to the legal ought. Understood this way, of course, the statement is trivially true. But there are other ways we can understand the statement. Perhaps the speaker is not referring to the legal ought, but to the prudential ought; the thought would then be that it’s in my own interest to drive within the speed limit (perhaps, e.g., because the speed limits in the area are well-enforced, such that exceeding them is bound to result in a traffic ticket). Or, to put the idea a bit more formally: If we were to rank possible worlds by prudence, the possible worlds in which I drive within the speed limit would be more highly ranked (i.e., would feature greater well-being for me) than those in which I exceed the speed limit. Understood in this way,
the statement “You ought to drive within the speed limit” would no longer be trivially true. Clearly these different senses of “ought” importantly affect the meaning of the statement; consequently, to know what the statement means, we must know what kind of ought it’s referring to. By contrast, any attempt at referring to an ought simpliciter would have to do without an ordering source. After all, the force of the “simpliciter” seems to be “There’s nothing more to say; you simply ought to do this!” On Kratzer’s view, this kind of talk doesn’t make sense; to know what it means to say, “You ought to Φ,” we must know according to what (etiquette, morality, prudence, etc.).

For a few reasons, however, I do not believe that this objection succeeds. The first is that a Moorean response is readily available. That is, despite how influential the Kratzerian view has been in linguistics, I’m less confident that it’s true than I am that our normative life is non-arbitrary and that ought simpliciter (or some other kind of normativity simpliciter—more on this later) is the only way to explain the non-arbitraryness. At a more basic level, statements of the form “I ought (simpliciter) to Φ” simply and intuitively seem to me to make sense—and in view of this, too, I’m more confident that they in fact make sense than I am that Kratzerian linguistics is true. If indeed Kratzerian linguistics is in incompatible with ought simpliciter, then, that strikes me more as a reason to reject the former than the latter.

Admittedly, such a response will be of little interest to those who don’t share my linguistic intuitions or background views here. Fortunately, there’s an additional response available, namely that my view can accommodate much of the motivation behind Kratzer’s. As Kratzer emphasizes, ought-statements are often ambiguous, and one way of removing the ambiguity is to say which normative standpoint one has in mind. These points I concede. But there’s no tension between them and my view; all my view adds is that there’s an additional way of removing the ambiguity, and that is to make clear that one means ought simpliciter (if in fact that’s what one has in mind). Thus, when someone says that we ought to do something, what we need to know, in order to remove the ambiguity, is whether he has
some particular standpoint in mind (and, if so, which) or whether he means ought \textit{simpliciter}. The latter, I claim, is just as effective a way of resolving the ambiguity as the former.

To some, this maneuver will not seem very satisfying. Surely there’s still a problem with the semantics of ought \textit{simpliciter}. For how could there be an ought at all, unless it’s an ought \textit{according to something}? But here we must be careful; it’s not as if “an action one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do” means or entails that the action is not prescribed by any normative standpoint. If it did, that would certainly be incoherent, since any action whatsoever is prescribed by some normative standpoint—indeed, prescribed by infinitely many normative standpoints. (After all, we can always simply stipulate a normative standpoint that prescribes whatever actions we want.) In the case of an action one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do, the standpoint that matters is simply the standpoint that prescribes all and only the actions that one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do. Just as other normative standpoints might be thought of as sets of ought-statements (e.g., for etiquette, some of the statements would be “One ought to reciprocate a friendly greeting,” “One ought to chew with one’s mouth closed,” and so on), so, too, is there a set of ought-statements—those that correspond to what one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do—that together constitute the standpoint of ought \textit{simpliciter}. If one prefers, one might even think of precisely this standpoint as the ordering source for claims involving ought \textit{simpliciter}. Even if we don’t always know which actions one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do—just as we might not always know which actions one ought, say, morally to do—we can know that there nevertheless is a normative standpoint that prescribes all and only the actions one ought \textit{simpliciter} to do, and that this standpoint can serve to rank possible worlds, much in the way Kratzer imagines other normative standpoints ranking possible worlds. Seen in this light, ought \textit{simpliciter} might well be compatible with Kratzerian linguistics after all.

The failure of the above objections, combined with the great theoretical and practical utility of ought \textit{simpliciter}, makes for a formidable case in favor of ought \textit{simpliciter}. Let’s turn now to how ought \textit{simpliciter} might help us make sense of normative authority. Earlier I spoke of how only some normative
standpoints bear on what we ought *simpliciter* to do. Now I’d like to be more precise. Here, in particular, is how we might understand authority in terms of ought *simpliciter*:

*The ought-simpliciter-based account of normative authority:* A standpoint has normative authority if and only if, when it says that we ought *simpliciter* to Φ, it is thereby true that we ought *simpliciter* to Φ.\(^{25}\)

For example, the ought-*simpliciter*-based account would—in conjunction with any view on which morality has authority—hold that when morality says we ought *simpliciter* to be friendly to others, it is thereby true that we ought *simpliciter* to be friendly to others. The “thereby” is important here; it is meant to exclude cases in which the truth of a standpoint’s ought-(*simpliciter*)-claims derives from other standpoints. For instance, imagine a standpoint whose only dictate is “You ought *simpliciter* to do what’s written in Book X,” and what’s written in book X is a list of activities that contribute to one’s well-being—activities like flossing one’s teeth, getting regular exercise, and so on. It would then seem true that, at least in most cases, we ought *simpliciter* to act in accordance with the “Follow Book X” standpoint. But this, I take it, would not suggest that the “Follow Book X” standpoint has authority. After all, the truth of its ought-(*simpliciter*)-claims would derive from prudence. It’s not as if, when the “Follow Book X” standpoint tells us to get regular exercise, it’s thereby true that we ought *simpliciter* to get regular exercise; rather, the fact that we ought *simpliciter* to get regular exercise stems from prudence, not the “Follow Book X” standpoint. For a normative standpoint to have authority, it must give rise to its own oughts *simpliciter*, rather than simply adverting to oughts *simpliciter* that are already given by other standpoints.

While I believe that the ought-*simpliciter*-based account of authority is helpful, it is not the only plausible account of authority. Everything that I say in this book is meant to be compatible with multiple accounts of authority—indeed, compatible with any major or plausible account thereof. Let’s turn, then,

\(^{25}\) Tännö appears sympathetic to the ought-*simpliciter*-based account in his (2010).
to some other accounts of authority and how they each would construe the claim that morality has authority. For example, we might think of authority in terms of normative reasons simpliciter:

*The reasons-simpliciter-based account of normative authority:* A standpoint has normative authority if and only if, when the standpoint says we are to Φ, we thereby have a normative reason simpliciter to Φ.\(^{26}\)

To illustrate, the reasons-simpliciter-based account would hold that if prudence has authority, then when prudence says we are to floss our teeth, we thereby have a normative reason simpliciter to floss our teeth. The normative reason simpliciter we have to floss our teeth would, plausibly, be that flossing our teeth contributes to our health, and that our health is a component of our well-being. More broadly, the normative reason simpliciter we have to Φ will depend on which standpoint we’re considering. For a different example, suppose that morality tells us to donate to charity, and that we thereby have a normative reason simpliciter to donate to charity. Our normative reason simpliciter to donate to charity would, plausibly, be that donating to charity reduces others’ suffering.

The reasons-simpliciter-based account might seem to raise the question of what a normative reason is. Alas, this is a difficult question to answer. One way of approaching an answer, though, is to distinguish normative reasons from another kind of reason, namely motivating reasons. Motivating reasons are reasons that explain an agent’s action. Consider, for example, an agent who desires to learn more about ducks, who believes that reading a certain book is the best way to learn more about ducks, and who then decides to read the book. The agent’s motivating reason for reading the book—that which explains his reading the book—would, plausibly, be the combination of his desire to learn more about ducks and his belief that reading the book is the best way to do so.\(^{27}\) Normative reasons, by contrast, are

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\(^{26}\) Those who seem sympathetic to this account of authority include Broome (2008: 96), Darwall (1990: 258), Husi (2011: 427), and Parfit (2011a: 146-148).

\(^{27}\) This view, of course, is associated primarily with Davidson (1963).
considerations that count in favor of an action. An agent’s normative reasons can come apart from her motivating reasons. For instance, the fact that an action would help someone is plausibly a normative reason to do it, but an agent’s motivating reason for doing the action might be something else entirely; perhaps the agent mistakenly thinks that the action would hurt someone, and does the action simply out of a desire to hurt that person.

Of course, to say that normative reasons are “considerations that count in favor of an action” is to offer a characterization of normative reasons that is itself normative. And one might wonder whether “considerations that count in favor of an action” is even a characterization in the first place, rather than a mere synonym. In the end, it may well be impossible to offer an informative characterization of normative reasons. Perhaps this is not ultimately a problem; all accounts must hit bedrock at some point. If, however, the difficulty of informatively characterizing normative reasons makes the reasons-simpliciter-based account feel unsatisfying, there remain other accounts of authority. I’ll briefly mention two. One of them accounts for authority in terms of goodness and badness simpliciter:

The value-simpliciter-based account of normative authority: A standpoint has normative authority if and only if, when it says that a thing is good (or bad) simpliciter, it is thereby true that that thing is good (or bad) simpliciter. For example, if etiquette has authority, and etiquette says that it is good simpliciter to begin with the outermost cutlery, then it is thereby good simpliciter to begin with the outermost cutlery.

We might also think of authority in terms of fittingness simpliciter:

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28 Philosophers with views that are at least roughly in the spirit of the value-simpliciter-based account include Moore (1903) and, more recently, Regan (2003; 2004).
The fittingness-simpliciter-based account of normative authority: A standpoint has normative authority if and only if, when it says that it is fitting simpliciter to Φ, it is thereby true that it is fitting simpliciter to Φ.²⁹ This account could allow talk of different senses of fittingness—for example, that it is morally fitting to help others in need, epistemically fitting to apportion our credences to the evidence, prudentially fitting to maintain a balanced diet, and so on—yet hold that any such instance of fittingness matters only if it is metaphysically identical with an instance of fittingness simpliciter. The relation between fittingness simpliciter and the more particular kinds of fittingness that have authority would then be analogous to how the ought-simpliciter-based account views the relation between ought simpliciter and the more particular kinds of ought that have authority.

Again, everything that I say in this book is intended to be consistent with all of the above accounts of authority. Indeed, it is intended to be consistent with any plausible account of authority. Depending on which standpoint or example I’m discussing, however, I sometimes find it easier to speak in terms of one account of authority than another. Going forward, whether I speak in terms of oughts, reasons, value, or fittingness will depend on what I find most convenient in the moment.

II. Moral Authority as Reflected in Our Moral Practices

Now that I’ve given some idea of how we might understand normative authority, we may turn to moral authority. Let’s assume in the rest of this chapter, for the sake of convenient exposition, that morality has authority. Now we might ask, “What are some ways in which morality’s authority is reflected or manifested?” Of course, the answer might seem obvious: If morality has authority, then we have, say, a normative reason to do the morally right thing and to refrain from doing morally wrong things. But in fact the authority of morality would be reflected in other ways, too. To see what these other ways are,

²⁹ While he does not speak explicitly in terms of normative authority, Chappell (2012: 689) proposes a view according to which fittingness is the “sole normative primitive.”
we need to look to our moral practices—that is, our ordinary, pre-theoretical moral thought, discourse, behavior, and phenomenology. As I think the following discussion will show, one feature that our moral practices have in common is that they treat certain considerations as if they have normative authority.

Take, for example, our use of moral discourse to command and to offer advice. When we do this, we intend the moral considerations to stand on their own, such that offering a moral reason is meant to be enough to get someone to do or to care about something—or at least, to see that he has a normative reason to do or to care about something.\textsuperscript{30} Moral reasons aren’t meant to require supplementation by other kinds of reasons (though of course, given human psychology, supplementing moral reasons with motivating reasons is often an effective way of making people feel more motivated to act morally). Or, to put the above point another way: In morality we find commands and advice-giving intended to state categorical imperatives (i.e., oughts that bind us independently of our desires, interests, or ends), rather than mere hypothetical imperatives (i.e., oughts that bind us in virtue of our desires, interests, or ends).

For example, imagine that we find a lost wallet full of money and ask our friend for her advice on what we should do with it. She’s likely to say, “You should turn it in to the authorities.” If we reply, “But that wouldn’t be in my interest,” she’ll then say, “I think you’ve misunderstood; I wasn’t suggesting that turning in the wallet is a means to furthering your own interest. I was saying simply that you ought to turn in the wallet, full stop—regardless of whether doing so is in your own interest.” And she’ll be right to say this. Moral norms, it seems, are categorical imperatives, a fact we recognize through the way we express moral commands and offer moral advice. To express moral commands and offer moral advice in a different way—in particular, as hypothetical imperatives, imperatives that are conditional on our having an interest in fulfilling them—would betray a failure to understand morality’s authority. Only

\textsuperscript{30} Slote (2012: 56) and Stroud (1998: 177) raise a similar point.
through being intended as categorical imperatives can our moral commands and advice treat moral
norms as if they matter in the way they in fact do, namely unconditionally.

Some might worry that my view of moral authority thus excludes ethicists who don’t recognize
categorical imperatives. In particular, ancient ethicists like Aristotle do not speak in terms of binding
moral obligations, but rather in terms of virtues that conduce to the agent’s flourishing. And it is
flourishing, or eudaimonia, that is the agent’s ultimate end and that constitutes the best life for the
agent. The relation between the ethical life and the agent’s own ends is, accordingly, much tighter on a
view like Aristotle’s than is typical of more modern ethical theories.

While I lack the space to go into an extended discussion of this worry, I’ll briefly raise a few
points. The first is that the notion of categorical imperatives might not be as alien to Aristotle’s view as it
first seems. For one thing, Aristotle does have a notion of ought (see, e.g., Nicomachean Ethics, III.1,
1111a30). And Aristotle certainly believes that agents ought to be virtuous. Moreover, the virtuous
agent does not act virtuously for the sake of ensuring his flourishing. Rather, he acts virtuously for the
sake of the noble (Nicomachean Ethics, IV.2, 1120a24; IX.8, 1168a33-35). Aristotle thus holds that
agents ought to act virtuously, and that they ought to be motivated to do so not by their own good, but
simply by the noble or the fine itself. While this is not quite a commitment to categorical imperatives,
neither is it a theory that has no trace of anything resembling a categorical imperative.

One might nevertheless press on with the worry. After all, what seems to make it the case that
agents ought to act for the sake of the noble, on Aristotle’s view, is that this conduces to the agent’s
flourishing, which is the agent’s ultimate end. Aristotle’s view appears to have no room, then, for a
notion of obligations that are binding independently of the agent’s ends. Yet here we must consider the
following question: What if—per impossibile, on Aristotle’s view—there were an agent whose ends did
not include flourishing? Would it still be the case that this agent, like other, more typical agents, ought
to be kind, courageous, and so on? If so, then Aristotle’s view does, in the end, seem to allow a sense in
which there are categorical imperatives. While agents would not be able to escape having flourishing as one of their ends, it would be the case that agents ought to act virtuously even if, *per impossibile*, flourishing were not one of their ends; in that way, the ought here would be independent of agents’ ends. But what if Aristotle were to go the other way—to say, that is, that if there were an agent whose ends did not include flourishing, then it would not be the case that that agent ought to be kind, courageous, and so on? This would certainly make Aristotle’s view resistant to categorical imperatives. I would also say, though, that if indeed Aristotle favors this horn of the dilemma, then it no longer seems all that striking to say that there is after all something deficient about Aristotle’s grasp of moral authority. To hold that agents could, through a change in their ends, “get off the hook” from their fundamental moral oughts—even if one holds such a scenario to be impossible in practice—betrays a failure to understand in fullness what a moral ought is. While Aristotle would of course still have some notion of moral authority, it would be incomplete.

Another relevant aspect of our moral practices is moral phenomenology. In particular, we experience moral obligations as obligations that are binding on us regardless of our desires and ends (Stroud 1998: 176). When we judge ourselves morally obligated to do something, we typically feel as if we ought to do it regardless of whether we desire to do it, of whether it’s in our own interest, and so on. To continue an example given earlier, I might come across a lost wallet and very much desire to keep it. Insofar as I have a sense of morality, however, I’ll also feel as if I simply must turn the wallet in to the authorities. Such feelings of bindingness are a further reflection of morality’s authority in that they represent moral obligations as worth caring about for their own sake, rather than worth caring about only in view of our having the relevant desires and ends.

Consider, finally, the role that blame plays in our moral practices. Typically, or at least often, we blame others when they violate moral norms. And when we violate moral norms, we likewise blame ourselves, through guilt. But just what is blame? While I don’t believe that anything I’ll say in this book
commits me to a particular account of blame, going forward it’ll be helpful to have at least a provisional account to speak in terms of. I’ll now briefly describe one account of blame, then, that I’m sympathetic to. This account, which comes from Peter Graham, defines blame as follows: “X blames Y for Φ-ing just in case X feels one of a certain class of negative emotions—call them ‘the blame emotions’—toward Y in response to Y’s Φ-ing” (2014: 389). Following P. F. Strawson and, more recently, R. J. Wallace, Graham posits that the paradigmatic blame emotions are indignation, resentment, and guilt (Ibid.). On this account, then, X blames Y for Φ-ing just in case X feels indignation, resentment, or guilt—or some emotion relevantly like them, if there are other blame emotions—toward Y in response to Y’s Φ-ing. When X is identical with Y, the blame manifests as guilt.32

In blaming people for violating moral norms, we implicitly take morality to have authority. After all, blaming someone requires an appeal to normative authority in some way; it wouldn’t make much sense to blame someone for Φ-ing, yet maintain that in Φ-ing she wasn’t going against any consideration with authority.33 Clearly blame is a special way of treating a (violation of a) norm; we don’t treat a violation of just any norm as meriting blame. And the reason why we don’t blame people for violating certain kinds of norms, such as those of Martian etiquette, seems to be that we recognize that such norms lack authority. To violate Martian etiquette does not merit blame, for Martian etiquette does not generate any normative reasons. By contrast, we take violations of moral norms much more seriously, and blame is one way we do so. To blame someone for violating a moral norm is inter alia to

31 Here Graham cites Strawson’s (1962/2003) and Wallace’s (1994).

32 As for the distinction between indignation and resentment, Graham points out that one can feel resentment only when one regards oneself as having been wronged, whereas one can feel indignation without so regarding oneself (2014: 389-390).

convey a sense that the person had a normative reason not to violate it. For violations of moral norms to justify blame, then, would itself be a reflection of moral authority.

Some might worry that blame, while indeed something we ordinarily do, is nevertheless something we shouldn’t do. Could it be that we blame others only because of mistaken assumptions about human action—as, for instance, Spinoza believes (*Ethics*, I, Appendix, iii; Iip49sch. C; IVp50sch.)? While this is, of course, not the place to go into an extended discussion of Spinoza, I’ll make two brief points. First, to categorically reject blame as confused is a radical and unpopular view. Surely to accept (at least some instances of) blame as legitimate is the more intuitively attractive view, and that is a point in its favor. Second, even if, for broadly Spinozist reasons—in particular, a universal lack of free will—it turns out that blaming other humans does rest on a confusion, there could still be a sense in which blame is properly a part of morality. In particular, it could still be true that we are justified in blaming others if they act freely in violating a moral norm. While it would turn out that there are no free beings, that would not affect the truth of the aforementioned conditional. For an analogy, consider how morality could still include a general duty to, say, maximize happiness, even if there were no rational (or even sentient) beings in the world. Such a duty could simply be understood as “For all rational beings X, X morally ought to maximize happiness”; the absence of any rational or sentient beings in the world would not bear on the truth of this proposition. In the same way, blame could still be a part of morality in principle—and ipso facto reflect morality’s authority—even if, in a world like ours, one can never rightly blame anyone for anything.

Another worry has to do with guilt. According to Gilbert Harman, we don’t need guilt to be moral. When one violates a moral norm, one can simply regret it and be determined to act better in the future; there’s no need for the negative affect that comes with guilt (Harman 2009: 208). Moreover, given how unpleasant a feeling guilt is, we’d indeed be better off to be free of it. Let our moral
motivation come simply from empathy, “concern for moral principle,” and so on, not from guilt (Harman 2009: 209).

Harman’s view raises the important question of what reason we have to feel guilt. Where I believe Harman goes wrong, however, is in supposing that the only, or at least the primary, candidate reason for feeling guilt lies in moral motivation. I’m prepared to grant Harman’s claim that guilt is not necessary to be motivated to act morally. Still, it seems to me that there is a different reason for feeling guilt, a reason Harman does not consider: Feeling guilt is necessary for taking seriously enough the wrongness of one’s wrong actions. For example, imagine that, out of negligence while operating heavy machinery, a person causes an accident that kills multiple bystanders. Now imagine that the person who caused the accident is the kind of agent Harman would have us be: someone who regrets his wrong actions and commits to acting better in the future, but who feels no guilt whatsoever. Such a person would acknowledge that his negligence in operating the machinery constituted a morally wrong disregard for human life, that what ensued was horrible, that he’d act differently if he could go back to that moment, and that he’ll be more conscientious in the future. All of these would be important things to feel and acknowledge. Yet such a person would still not feel bad in the slightest about what he did.34 And it’s here, I think, that something seems to be missing from his moral understanding. No matter how committed he is to acting better in the future, for him not to feel even the smallest pang of remorse betrays a failure to fully grasp the wrongness of his action. In this way, guilt seems essential to taking our own wrong actions as seriously as we should.

34 Of course, he might feel bad in some way other than guilt; for instance, he might feel sympathy for the victims and their families. But such feelings would not be a matter of his having done a wrong action. Insofar as he’d feel any negative affect here, it’d seem to be the same as he might feel if he had merely heard about someone else’s causing a similar accident.
We see, then, that if indeed morality has authority, it is through these moral practices—(1) commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives, (2) feelings of bindingness, and (3) blame—that such authority is reflected.35

Yet now some might have a worry: Aren’t these “moral practices” sometimes a part of clearly non-moral standpoints and activities? For example, imagine someone who takes chess very seriously, and is watching his friend play a game against someone else. Mightn’t he blame his friend for making a bad move? Mightn’t he feel guilty if he had made the same move? We can imagine that, were he the one in the game, considering his next move, he’d feel a certain bindingness when he realizes what would be the best move—a sense that he simply must make that move, even if the game has ceased to be fun for him. Likewise, we can imagine that, when he offers advice to his friend, he doesn’t intend it as a mere hypothetical imperative; he means that she should make the advised move full stop. A similar point could be made about etiquette; doesn’t etiquette contain myriad instances of (non-moral) blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives? (As before, all we need do is imagine someone who takes etiquette very seriously...) And insofar as these and other non-moral standpoints do incorporate blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives, these practices are not distinctive to morality, and thus cannot be used to isolate what moral authority is like. In fact, even to call them “moral practices,” as I’ve been doing, would be misleading.

In response to this worry, I have three points. The first is that many such instances of supposedly non-moral blame, feelings of bindingness, and so on are in fact derived from underlying moral concerns. Much of etiquette, for example, can be understood as a way of showing respect for others. To illustrate, if someone to whom I’m being introduced extends his hand to me, but I refuse to shake it, I haven’t

35 Of course, I don’t claim the above to be an exhaustive list of our moral practices. They’re simply the moral practices that seem to best reflect morality’s authority.
simply violated a protocol of etiquette; I’ve communicated disrespect to him. Since respecting others is a moral concern, it’s no surprise that I’d be subject to blame here, that I might well feel guilty afterward, that people in general would have feelings of bindingness in association with hand-shaking, and so on.

To take another example, the above point applies even to sports. For example, suppose that I’ve gathered some people together for a game of soccer, and shortly after the game begins, I get an opening to score a goal. In the heat of the moment, I might well feel as if I simply must score the goal, or at least try to score the goal. It occurs to me that I could do something else; for example, I could simply start dancing like a chicken. But I realize that I’d feel guilty afterward if I did that, and that if anyone else in my present circumstances started dancing like a chicken, I’d blame her for it. Why is this? A plausible answer is that other people have taken the time and effort to come play soccer with me, and my dancing like a chicken would undermine what we’ve agreed to do with our time together. In that way, it’d be disrespectful to them—disrespectful of their time, of their effort, and of their choices. Thus, it’s no surprise that moral practices like blame, guilt, and so on would enter into play here.

What about cases where blame, feelings of bindingness, and so on within an apparently non-moral standpoint are not derived from underlying moral concerns? Here I’d say—and this is the second point—that even in these cases, the blame, feelings of bindingness, and so on are not intrinsic to the standpoint in question (unlike with morality). Rather than being a core part of it, they’re peripheral, a mere product of certain contingent dispositions that some people happen to bring to the standpoint or activity in question.

To illustrate, consider a protocol of etiquette that is not plausibly a matter of respecting others: responding in the third person to invitations addressed in the third person. While someone might blame others for failing to adhere to this protocol, clearly such blame isn’t a core part of etiquette itself; it’s possible to have something perfectly recognizable as etiquette that eschews such blame. (For instance,

36 I borrow this amusing example from Dave Estlund.
one could simply prefer to follow this protocol oneself, and one could find it pleasant when others follow it—but one need not be bothered or inclined to blame when others fail to follow it.) Thus, the presence of blame (or some other moral practice) in a particular instance of a non-moral standpoint or activity does not show that blame (or whatever other moral practice) is part of the non-moral standpoint or activity itself. By contrast, it is much more difficult to imagine morality without blame and the other moral practices I’ve discussed.

Lastly, I find it significant that when a person does incorporate blame (or some other moral practice) into a non-moral activity or standpoint—and does so in a way that is not justified by any underlying moral concerns—we tend to recognize him as making a mistake. Return for a moment to the person from the above example, the one who blames others for failing to respond in the third person to invitations addressed in the third person. Most of us, I think, would judge that such a person is merely being uptight; he’s implicitly attributing an importance to the standpoint or activity (in this case, the more minor reaches of etiquette) that it does not in fact have. We might say to him, “Hey, it’s just a silly rule.” The contrast to morality here could scarcely be more evident; we’d never say to someone, “Hey, it’s just a moral obligation.” Were someone to say such a thing to us, we’d be right to think that he’s thereby betrayed a failure to understand the kind of thing morality is.

At this point, some might object that it need not be a mistake to feel guilt in, say, the context of competitive games, even if the guilt has nothing to do with any underlying moral concerns (such as a failure to respect one’s teammates). For example, if one misses a shot in a game of basketball, one might naturally feel a twinge of guilt. But need one be making a mistake in feeling guilty? To be sure, if the guilt were overwhelming or long-lasting, such that one had trouble sleeping or otherwise taking care of oneself, that would certainly be a mistake. But how could it be a mistake to feel a mere twinge of guilt that is forgotten in a flash? Almost everyone feels this upon fumbling a ball, missing a shot, and so on.
Are we really going to say that this is all a mistake, a mistake that pervades every competitive athletic context, rather than simply a necessary and innocuous part of playing any sport?  

However common these fleeting moments of guilt are, I hold that they are in fact a mistake. To explain, let me first make a concession. I certainly acknowledge that in playing a sport, one can have reasonable hopes (e.g., that one’s shot will go in the basket), and that sometimes these reasonable hopes will be frustrated. And when this happens, I don’t believe that it need be a mistake to feel in some sense let down, provided that one doesn’t go overboard. But there’s a difference between that kind of feeling—the feeling of “Dang it! The ball didn’t go in”—and guilt. Feeling guilty involves a negative affect toward oneself—in particular, blaming oneself for the mistake—and this is often inappropriate. Provided that the missed shot (for example) was not a reflection of carelessness, but was a genuinely well-chosen shot that simply didn’t happen to go in, it would be a mistake to feel even slightly guilty about it (just as it would be a mistake to blame one’s teammate, had one’s teammate been the one to miss the shot).

Notice, too, that the rival view here—that it is no mistake to feel guilty for minor sporting slip-ups—has at least one serious problem. Return for a moment to the above basketball example, the one in which a genuinely well-chosen shot simply doesn’t go in. Now imagine that the player who attempted

37 Thanks to Iain Laidley and Chad Marxen for pressing me on this point.

38 One might worry that this example runs together two distinct points. The first is that many or most mistakes in sports are not voluntary, and that guilt is justified only for actions one does voluntarily. The second point is that sports are too trivial to justify guilt (even when it comes to actions that are voluntary). And, while the above example of missing a shot nicely illustrates the first point, the second point still needs more in the way of support. In particular, what’s needed is a sports-related example of an action that is voluntary, but nevertheless a mistake. Consider, for instance, a baseball player who attempts to steal a base when in fact, as he later realizes, he should have stayed on his base, and that he gets tagged out as a result. Should he feel guilty about this? If the attempt to steal the base involved no carelessness—or, to put it a different way, if it’s false that he should have known better—then he should not feel guilty. And even if there was carelessness here, whether he should feel guilty seems to depend on further contextual features. Imagine that the player is not just in any baseball game, but an MLB game in which the collective goal is to put on as intense and skilled a competition as possible, and in which an audience has gathered and paid to see such a competition. Here, making an inexcusably ill-conceived attempt to steal a base would go against the kind of competition that the teams are so committed to realizing and that the audience has paid to see, and would in that way justify some measure of guilt. Now suppose, however, that he’s simply playing a casual game of baseball for fun with his friends. In a context like this, the ill-conceived attempt to steal the base would not seem to justify any guilt.
the shot feels no guilt about missing it. The view under consideration now faces a dilemma: Either the player is making a mistake in not feeling guilty, or he is making no mistake in not feeling guilty. Either horn leads to trouble. The trouble with the first horn is simply that it seems highly implausible to say that not feeling guilty in such a case is a mistake. (Whatever happened to the recognition that it’s not winning that ultimately matters here, but whether one’s having fun?)

The second horn, by contrast, has more surface plausibility; I suspect most would agree that it is not a mistake for the player here to feel no guilt about missing the shot. Notice, however, the consequence this horn leaves us with. The view under consideration holds that it is not a mistake to feel guilty for minor sporting slip-ups, yet now it’s saying that it is also not a mistake not to feel guilty for a certain minor sporting slip-up. On such a view, guilt turns out to be rationally optional in some cases: One may feel guilty or not feel guilty about Φ-ing, and in neither case be making a mistake. Yet that seems weird; how could a feeling like guilt ever be rationally optional in this way? It seems much more plausible to say that of any action, either you ought to feel guilty for it or you ought not to feel guilty for it. Remember, after all, that to feel guilt is to blame oneself for a wrong—and for any wrong, it is either the case that one is (at least to some extent) blameworthy for it or that one is not (at all) blameworthy for it. Presumably the extent to which one ought to blame oneself for a wrong mirrors the extent to which one is blameworthy for it—such that one ought to blame oneself heavily for a wrong one is exclusively blameworthy for, slightly for a wrong one is only slightly blameworthy for, and not at all for a wrong one is in no way blameworthy for. In any such case, there is some fact of the matter as to whether (and, if so, how much) one should blame oneself—and, ipso facto, how much guilt one should feel. It is for this reason that there seem to be no plausible cases in which guilt over a certain action is rationally optional. Thus, despite initial appearances, the second horn of the above dilemma does not work, either. Given that the implausibility of each horn of the dilemma, the view under consideration—that it is no mistake to feel guilty for minor sporting slip-ups—is difficult to accept.
Consider, moreover, how guilt can accumulate. While the twinge of guilt one feels after a single sporting slip-up might not seem very significant, we must remember that if one feels guilty after every such slip-up, that will make for a considerably larger extent of guilt over the course of a game or a season. Why should innocent sporting slip-ups together occasion such an amount of guilt? Is it not a better ideal for sports simply to be able to enjoy them? While it might at first sound paradoxical, surely a key part of doing sports well is knowing how to fail well, and even how to lose well. One should hold one’s head high, recognize that one has given it one’s all, and celebrate that it was a hard-fought match. Feeling guilty about one’s missed shots is not part of such an ideal; indeed, it seems outright antithetical to it. Of course, guilt in such contexts remains understandable. It is difficult not to feel slightly guilty when one misses a shot or fumbles a ball. But being understandable is not the same as being reasonable. Were we more rational and more mature, we would not feel guilty about such things.

The key upshot of the discussion thus far is this. If indeed, as I’ve argued, the moral practices I’ve been discussing—(1) commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives, (2) feelings of bindingness, and (3) blame—are a core, distinctive part of morality, then we can use them to determine which norms count as moral norms. In particular, moral norms are those which (possibly inter alia) it is fitting to (1) put in the form of commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives, (2) have feelings of bindingness toward, and (3) blame people for violating without excuse. In this way, these moral practices offer us an independent grip on the content of morality. This is important for my project, since one of my main claims is that all normative authority is moral authority. Without an independent grip on the content of morality, totalism would risk becoming trivially true; the worry would be that I’m merely using “moral” as a catchall term for any kind of norm that has authority. Once we understand morality in terms of the above moral practices, though, we make available a non-question-begging way of arguing for totalism: We can simply examine each kind of norm that seems to have authority, and then consider what connections it has to the above moral practices (e.g., if it’s
fitting to blame people for violating its norms without excuse). To the extent that it is associated with
the moral practices in this way, a kind of normative authority is itself moral. This will be a driving point
of the next chapter. But before we get to that, let’s consider a challenge to moral authority.

III. But Doesn’t Morality, Understood This Way, Alienate and Dominate?

Some might worry that my above list of moral practices suggests a rather narrow sense of “morality.”
Rather than morality in the broad sense (sometimes called “ethics”), the sense which informs us simply
of how we should live, I might seem to be speaking of morality strictly as a set of obligations and
responses to violations thereof. According to some, such an obligation-centric approach to morality is
liable to alienate us from what matters most.

No one is more closely associated with this charge than Bernard Williams. Williams holds that
one of the primary flaws of morality (in Williams’s special, obligation-centric sense of “morality”) is the
way it “tr[ies] to make everything into obligations” (1985: 180). This proliferation of obligations comes
from two assumptions unique to morality. The first is that “only an obligation can beat an obligation”
(Ibid., Williams’s emphasis). That is, if certain considerations that obtain would by themselves create an
obligation for someone, then the only way one could at that moment fail to be under that obligation is
to be obligated (by some other set of considerations) to do something else instead. For example,

imagine that I’ve promised to visit a friend at a certain time and place, and that, consequently, I’m under
an obligation to follow through. Now imagine, however, that I unexpectedly receive an opportunity to
further an important cause, but pursuing this opportunity is incompatible with visiting my friend.39 It
may very well be that I should now further the important cause rather than visiting my friend. “But,” as

39 As Williams notes, various details could be added to the example. For instance, just what is the cause I’m
considering supporting, and how important is it? How badly does my friend want me to visit her? If I decide not to
visit my friend, will I have the chance to inform her of my change of plans? Here I’ll follow Williams’s (1985: 180)
own practice of leaving such details for the reader to fill in, in whatever way she finds them to help the example
make its intended point.
Williams notes, “obligations have a moral stringency, which means that breaking them attracts blame. The only thing that can be counted on to cancel this, within the economy of morality, is that the rival action should represent another and more stringent obligation” (Ibid.). In the present example, then, my obligation to visit my friend will simply have been replaced by a different obligation, namely the obligation to further the important cause.

The second assumption of morality is “obligation-out, obligation-in” (Williams 1985: 181, his emphasis). According to this assumption, particular obligations are always applications of more general obligations. For example, if I come across a person lying injured on the sidewalk, presumably I have an obligation to help him. Yet this obligation would stem from a more general obligation, namely the obligation to help others in an emergency. And now we seem to be on a slippery slope toward a proliferation of obligations. For, as Williams suggests, “many, perhaps any, moral considerations could overrule some obligation on some occasion” (Ibid.). If, per the first assumption of morality, only an obligation can beat an obligation, then the overruling moral considerations in any such case will themselves amount to an obligation. And by obligation-out, obligation-in, this particular obligation will be an application of a more general one. In this way, it turns out that “many, perhaps all, such [i.e., moral] considerations are related to some general obligations” (Ibid.).

In a moral landscape like this, we’re liable to find that at every moment we’re subject to some obligation or other. While one might at first think that there’s still room for the strictly permissible—that is, cases in which morality does not require me to perform any action, yet permits me to perform at least one action—such a notion is apt to break down. Williams (1985: 181-182) explains:

[I]f we have accepted general and indeterminate obligations to further various moral objectives, as the last set of thoughts encourages us to do, they will be waiting to provide work for idle hands, and the thought can gain a footing (I am not saying that it has to) that I could be better employed than in doing something I am under no obligation to do, and, if I could be, then I ought to be: I am under an obligation not to waste time in doing things I am under no obligation to do.
What’s more, given that only an obligation can beat an obligation, the only way I could be permitted to, say, spend time doing things I want to do for my own sake, is by being under a duty to *myself* to do so. Williams finds little hope in this prospect, though, calling such duties “fraudulent” (1985: 182). Looking back on all these considerations, Williams concludes that “[i]f obligation is allowed to structure ethical thought, there are several natural ways in which it can come to dominate life altogether” (*Ibid.*).

Suppose that obligations were to dominate life altogether—why would this be bad? Williams doesn’t say a great deal about this in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, but his other works give us a sense of his view. In his critique of utilitarianism, in particular, Williams (1981: 14) argues that a fatal flaw of utilitarianism is the way it saddles the agent with an unceasing obligation to maximize utility, leaving her with no space to permissibly pursue her personal projects and commitments. Consider, for example, Williams’s (1973/1988: 33-34) classic case of George, the chemist who’s offered a job furthering chemical weapons research. George morally objects to the development and use of chemical weapons, but he also knows that if he doesn’t take the job, someone else will—and that this other person is much more eager to advance chemical weapons research than George is. In order to stop the harms that would result from the other candidate’s zealous advancement of the research, George is, according to utilitarianism, morally required to take the job—even though this would violate his deep personal commitment to not using his expertise to develop chemical weapons.

Williams takes this case to illustrate how utilitarianism *alienates* the agent from her deepest projects and commitments. In demanding that agents set aside or even abandon their personal projects and commitments for the sake of maximizing utility, utilitarianism is an outright assault on agents’ integrity (Williams 1973/1988: 48-49). Presumably the lesson generalizes: *Any* view that leaves no space for agents to permissibly pursue their personal projects and commitments asks agents to give up their
integrity, and is in that way unacceptable. This, then, seems to be what Williams ultimately finds so troubling about the proliferation of obligations under morality.

But does morality in fact imply that obligations to others pervade every aspect of our lives? There’s reason to be skeptical. For one thing, Williams does not say why he finds duties to oneself “fraudulent.” Absent an explanation of why there are no duties to oneself, Williams’s argument is missing a critical piece. For even if we are under a vast array of duties to others, it remains open that such duties are to be balanced against whatever duties we have to ourselves. It likewise remains open that someone who balances these two kinds of duties in the right way will, to a significant extent, continue to pursue her personal projects and commitments, and in that way retain her integrity. Conceived in this way, morality is not unduly alienating.

The problems for Williams’s argument do not end there. As Stephen Darwall points out, both of the assumptions that Williams claims to lead to morality’s proliferation of obligations—“Only an obligation can beat an obligation,” along with obligation-out, obligation-in—do not in fact seem essential to morality. Let’s begin with the first assumption. Is it true that if one has a prima facie obligation to act a certain way, then the only way one could at that moment fail to be under that obligation is by being under another obligation to do something else instead? Not according to commonsense morality. Commonsense morality, after all, holds that one can be exempted from an obligation if fulfilling the obligation would be dangerous or highly costly (Darwall 1987: 78). To return to the example of the person lying injured on the sidewalk, it seems plausible that I have an obligation to help—until we stipulate that the injured person is, say, being circled by wolves. Once we add the element of danger, it no longer seems that I’m morally obligated to be a good Samaritan. To be sure, being a good Samaritan in such a case is still a morally good thing to do; it’s not as if I’m now under a contrary moral obligation to put my own well-being first, an obligation that I would be violating by rushing to the other’s aid. In short, helping the other in such a case is supererogatory, not obligatory.
And what makes it fail to be obligatory is not some contrary obligation, but simply the danger that I’d have to put myself in if I decided to help.

So much for “Only an obligation can beat an obligation,” then. Let’s now turn to obligation-out, obligation-in. Is it true that our particular obligations are always applications of more general ones? It might at first seem that it is, for there is certainly a sense in which particular obligations are associated with more general ones: If a person is obligated to Φ in a certain set of circumstances, then anyone in relevantly similar circumstances is likewise obligated to Φ. But this, of course, is just the requirement of supervenience. And supervenience is too bare and basic a requirement of moral properties—indeed, many would say that it is simply a logical requirement—for anything of great substance to be inferred from it. Certainly supervenience does not by itself suggest that there is no room for actions that are strictly permissible. After all, as we saw above, commonsense morality holds that obligations can be defeated by sufficient personal cost or danger to the agent. Insofar as particular obligations are linked to more general ones, then, the more general ones can include provisos about such defeaters (Darwall 1987: 81). For example, in the case of someone’s being obligated to help the injured person, the more general obligation need not be simply “Help a stranger in an emergency,” but could very well be “Help a stranger in an emergency, unless doing so would require putting yourself in danger or bearing some other significant cost.” It is only the former kind of obligation, that which we conceive as not allowing for defeaters (except perhaps, as Williams points out, other obligations), whose proliferation would lead morality to “dominate” people’s lives in the sense that Williams is concerned about. If we think of obligations in that way, then it’s simply false that particular obligations are always applications of more general ones. If, by contrast, we think of obligations as allowing for the kind of defeaters discussed here, then while it seems true that particular obligations are applications of more general ones, this does not seem problematic.

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The goal of this book is to make a case that all normative authority is moral authority. To effectively make such a case, however, requires first clarifying what one means by both “normative authority” and “moral authority.” It is this necessary groundwork that has been the focus of the present chapter. In particular, I’ve argued for (1) a conception of normative authority that centers on forms of normativity simpliciter (e.g., ought simpliciter) and (2) a conception of moral authority that centers on our moral practices—especially blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives. With these ideas in place, I can begin my arguments for moral totalism—arguments that I’ll put forth in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2: ALL NORMATIVE AUTHORITY IS MORAL AUTHORITY

I. Introduction

In this chapter I’ll argue that all normative authority is moral authority. This view clashes sharply with the default view that some things—things like aesthetic value, prudence, epistemic rationality, and instrumental rationality—have a non-moral kind of authority.\(^\text{40}\) In part because it’s an unusual view I’ll be defending, I should be clear just what the view is. My view is not simply that morality trumps or overrides other normative standpoints. Such a view allows for non-moral normative standpoints to retain some authority, even if it’s an authority that’s often overridden by that of morality. My view, namely moral totalism, is more radical; it rejects that there is any such thing as non-moral authority in the first place. Or, to put totalism in terms of the reasons-based account of authority: Necessarily, insofar as there are any normative reasons at all, they are wholly moral.

While I find it easiest to speak in terms of the reasons-based account, my arguments in this chapter should work regardless of what we view as the normative primitive. Recall that totalism can be formulated in terms of non-reasons-based accounts of normative authority. In particular, any of the following would be an adequate formulation of totalism:

“Necessarily, insofar as there is any value\(^\text{41}\) at all, it is wholly moral.”

“Necessarily, insofar as there is any fittingness at all, it is wholly moral.”


\(^{41}\) By “value” here, I of course refer only to kinds of value that have authority (thus excluding, for example, numerical value). An analogous qualification applies to “fittingness” and “oughts” below.
“Necessarily, insofar as there are any oughts at all, they are wholly moral.”

II. An Argument that I Won’t Be Using

Before presenting my own arguments for totalism, I’d like to point an argument that I won’t be making. In particular, some simply define the moral as whatever is overriding.\(^{42}\) On one hand, there’s a worry that this overridingness-definition of the moral, in opting for stipulation over argument, would be too easy for my purposes. But a deeper worry is that overridingness would simply not be enough to entail totalism, for overridingness leaves it open that there are non-moral kinds of authority to be overridden. Indeed, if we read the claim of overridingness strongly enough—that is, not just as the claim that moral authority would override whatever other kinds of authority there might be, but as the claim that there are in fact other kinds of authority, and that moral authority always overrides them—then overridingness is flat-out inconsistent with totalism. According to totalism, there never was any non-moral kind of authority to be overridden in the first place.

The overridingness-definition of the moral does, however, suggest at least one insight. The claim that a person’s moral standards are whatever he treats as supremely important is, of course, controversial. But notice that it at least has a certain plausibility to it that doesn’t seem to attach to the analogous position about any other normative standard. For example, it doesn’t seem even initially plausible that a person’s prudential standards, etiquette standards, or aesthetic standards are whatever he treats as supremely important. The reason is that these other normative standards are conceptually tied to a particular kind of content—for example, one’s prudential standards center on what one takes to advance one’s own well-being, one’s aesthetic standards center on what one takes to be beautiful, and so on—and for any such kind of content, we can imagine someone who treats it as being overridden

\(^{42}\) See, for example, Becker (1973b: 123-124). When I speak of one normative standpoint’s overriding another, what I mean is that whenever the two issue conflicting ought-verdicts, we ought simpliciter to follow the ought-verdict of the first standpoint.
by something else. To continue the above examples, some people take certain values (e.g., environmental activism) to be more important than their own well-being, more important than the beautiful, and so on. With moral standards, by contrast, it seems more plausible that there is no such conceptual link to a particular kind of content; rather, it seems conceptually open that moral standards are about something more abstract and general, such as simply “what matters.” This difference between moral and non-moral standards is one clue that morality may have a special importance.

Of course, some may not find the overridingness-definition of the moral very plausible. I have in mind, in particular, those who favor a substantive or content-based definition of morality.\(^4^3\) An example of such a definition is the view that morality is, definitionally, about helping others and resolving interpersonal conflict. I’ll now say why I find such content-based definitions of morality unsatisfactory.

The problem with the content-based definition of morality is simple: There seems to be no content-based common denominator among all the plausible moral views—or at least, coherent and recognizably moral views. For instance, some views hold that morality centers on advancing human well-being, whereas others hold that it centers on virtue (where virtue need not advance well-being\(^4^4\)), whereas still others hold that it centers on obeying God. Such views need not share any content, yet they are all recognizably moral views. The content-based definition of morality seems unable to account for this; after all, if morality is defined on the basis of some particular content, then a normative view with wholly different content could not possibly count as a moral view.

The problem becomes especially clear in light of moral disagreement. Imagine that one person asserts that our fundamental moral obligation is to maximize human well-being, while another person replies that our fundamental moral obligation is to obey God. Surely these people are disagreeing; it’s

\(^{4^3}\) For views in this spirit, see Baier (1958) and Warnock (1971).

\(^{4^4}\) Consider, for example, a view according to which virtue consists in ascetic activity.
not as if they must simply be talking past one another. And if they’re indeed disagreeing, it seems that they must be talking about the same thing, namely morality, however radically they differ on its content. Yet if the content-based definition of morality were right, then these people would not be disagreeing. Given the radically different content of the views they espouse, at most one such view could count as a morality; the other view would fail to fulfill the content-based definitional criteria of morality (whatever we imagine them to be), and would thus fail to be a morality at all. It seems, then, that the content-based definition of morality is a poor definition. At most, content-based considerations might be used to define some particular moral system(s); they cannot be used to define what, at the most general level, morality itself is. More briefly: Content-based considerations can perhaps define a morality, but not morality.

One might raise some objections here. For example, what if morality is defined by its content, but many people are simply mistaken about what that content is? In response, I’ll admit that I have no way of proving that this couldn’t be the case. Yet notice that if it were, then many people who take themselves to have moral views, and who also speak and behave as if they have moral views, would in fact fail to have any moral views. And that doesn’t seem very plausible.

There is, however, another, more difficult objection: What if morality is defined by its content, but its content is simply at a high level of abstraction? For instance, perhaps what’s morally good is (definitionally) what an ideal spectator would approve of, and people simply disagree about what kinds of actions an ideal spectator would approve of. A proposal like this might seem to allow the content-based definition of morality to accommodate moral disagreement. The problem, though, is that no matter which content-based definition of morality we go with, even if it’s a highly abstract one, people will disagree about it. To continue the earlier example, we might imagine someone who rejects the view

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45 Here, of course, I’m echoing an argument more famously given by Hare (1952: Ch. 9.4). Another, more recent argument in this spirit comes from Horgan and Timmons (1991).
that what’s morally good is (definitionally) what an ideal spectator would approve of. Now, if (this version of) the content-based definition of morality is correct, then such a person is making a conceptual error. Even if this person’s view of morality is in fact mistaken, however, to claim that it must be a conceptual error seems like an overly strong diagnosis. What’s more, someone like this might well still take herself to have moral views, and by all other indications appear to have moral views; she would simply be conceiving of them as being about something other than what an ideal spectator would approve of. Yet if (this version of) the content-based definition of morality is correct, we would have to say that she in fact does not have any moral views. This, too, is an unpalatable result.

The problems with content-based definitions of morality don’t just support my above point about the distinct plausibility of the overridingness-definition of morality; they also help prepare the way for the broader arguments of this chapter. How so? Without getting too far ahead of myself, my arguments in this chapter will begin by positing a key feature of morality: pervasiveness. Putting it in terms of reasons, moral pervasiveness is the following phenomenon: Necessarily, any normative reason, whatever additional kinds it might be, is at least a moral reason. More briefly, we might describe moral pervasiveness as the fact that everything that matters, matters (at least) morally. Under moral pervasiveness, normative authority itself has moral import.

Moral pervasiveness is clearly incompatible with content-based definitions of morality. If we define morality by its content, then it makes no sense to think that, were things outside that content to have authority, they would give us moral reasons; after all, things outside that content would, by definition, be wholly separate from morality. In this way, to believe in moral pervasiveness would be to make a conceptual mistake. It’s easy to see, then, how content-based definitions of morality could be a source of resistance to the arguments I’ll be making in this chapter. Thus, if indeed my earlier points suffice to undermine content-based definitions of morality, that removes what would otherwise be an immediate obstacle for my subsequent arguments.
III. The Explanatory Argument from Moral Pervasiveness

Let’s move on, then, to my arguments for totalism. As mentioned above, both arguments appeal to moral pervasiveness: that is, the fact that necessarily, everything that matters, matters (at least to some extent) morally. In this way, morality “pervades” authority more broadly. The “at least to some extent” might seem odd here—isn’t this chapter supposed to be arguing that moral mattering is the only kind of mattering there is? Yes, but the question is how to get there. That everything that matters, matters at least to some extent morally (i.e., moral pervasiveness), is only a first step in arguing that moral mattering is the only kind of mattering there is. The question that my first argument goes on to ask is what explains moral pervasiveness—and, as I’ll argue, the best explanation is totalism: The reason why everything that matters, matters at least to some extent morally, is that moral mattering is the only kind of mattering there is.

But before going into detail on how to explain moral pervasiveness, I must first show that moral pervasiveness is real. My argument for moral pervasiveness will be inductive. While I cannot consider all non-moral standpoints, I will at least consider the most salient ones. And what I find is that such standpoints together support moral pervasiveness. Here, in more detail, is how they do so. Non-moral standpoints can be divided broadly into two groups: those which, at least at first glance, seem to have authority, and those that don’t. I’ll consider the former group first, arguing that the concerns that lie at

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46 For ease of exposition, in what follows I’ll drop this modal qualification.

47 Note that this use of “pervasiveness” is distinct from how some other philosophers use the term. Louden (1988: 374), for example, uses “pervasiveness” to mean that “no voluntary human action is in principle resistant to moral assessment.” My use of “pervasiveness,” by contrast, means (to put it in terms of normative reasons) that any reason, whatever additional kinds it might be, is at least a moral reason. Were some actions resistant to moral assessment, that would be compatible with moral pervasiveness in my sense; the key would simply be that we have no reasons of any other kind when it comes to such actions, either. For other descriptions of moral pervasiveness in Louden’s sense, see Phillips (1977: 156-157) and Scheffler (1992: 24-25).
the heart of these standpoints and that give them their apparent authority themselves turn out to be morally weighty, such that the reasons the standpoints tell us we have are (at least)\textsuperscript{48} moral reasons.

Next I’ll consider non-moral standpoints that appear to lack authority, along with those for which it’s simply unclear whether they have authority. Non-moral normative standpoints that appear to lack authority are, of course, easy cases for me. After all, moral pervasiveness is a thesis about normative standpoints that do have authority—namely, the thesis that the reasons they tell us we have are moral reasons—so normative standpoints that lack authority are straightforwardly compatible with moral pervasiveness.\textsuperscript{49} As for non-moral normative standpoints that neither clearly have nor clearly lack authority, these may, again, be divided into two groups: those that in fact turn out to have authority and those that don’t. The latter group is compatible with moral pervasiveness, for the reason just explained. But what about the former group? What if some or many of the non-moral standpoints whose authority is unclear in fact turn out to have authority? This kind of case, I think, is the most challenging for moral pervasiveness. Nevertheless, I’ll argue that for every such standpoint, if it does have authority, then the reasons it tells us we have are moral reasons.

A. Prudence

Let’s begin, then, with some non-moral standpoints that appear to have authority. The first such standpoint is prudence: that is, the normative standpoint that tells one to favor one’s own well-being, to do whatever best furthers one’s own interests. Now, there are various views on the relation between prudence and morality. On one view, prudence and morality are closely related, but the latter is

\textsuperscript{48} For ease of exposition, in what follows I’ll drop this qualification. When I talk about how moral pervasiveness (again, not to be confused with totalism) means that all authoritative standpoints provide us with moral reasons, this is not to be read as the claim that they provide us only with moral reasons. Rather, the claim is that the reasons they provide us with are moral in addition to whatever other kinds of reasons they might be.

\textsuperscript{49} Of course, even in cases where a normative standpoint lacks authority, we might still often have reason to follow its verdicts. When this is the case, I’ll explain why. Our reasons to follow the standpoints’ verdicts, I’ll argue, turn out to be independent moral reasons.
subordinate to the former; you indeed have good reason to heed morality’s verdicts, but this reason, as it turns out, is entirely prudential. You should obey moral rules only because doing so is ultimately to your benefit. For example, you should be honest and keep your promises because doing so will give you a reputation for being trustworthy, and others will thereby be more willing to trust and cooperate with you.

If this view is true, that spells trouble for moral pervasiveness—for, while it would be true that you have prudential reasons to be moral, it would be false that you have moral reasons to be prudential. Prudence, not morality, would be the foundational and authoritative normative standpoint here. Or, to put the point in yet another way: On this view, it is not that prudence matters morally, but that morality matters prudentially. Yet if moral pervasiveness holds, and if indeed prudence has authority, then prudence would matter morally.

For prudence to be the basis of morality in this way, then, is indeed inconsistent with moral pervasiveness. Thus, if I’m to defend moral pervasiveness, I should now offer some evidence against this view. But first, let’s become yet clearer on just how this view goes against moral pervasiveness: not by positing prudential reasons as more fundamental than moral reasons, but by positing prudential reasons while obliterating moral reasons, as a kind of reason in their own right, entirely. While you still have reason to be kind, to help others, and so on, you lack any distinctively moral reason to do so; your only reason for doing so would be that it makes you better off, and this (on the view being described, anyway) is a prudential reason, not a moral reason. To make prudence the basis of morality in this way is, in short, to embrace a form of moral nihilism.

Putting the point in such stark terms might be surprising, yet it seems to me a fair assessment. To further support the point, we might imagine two worlds in which moral nihilism is true. In the first world, we lack any reason to follow conventional morality (being kind, helping others, etc.) at all. In the second world, by contrast, we do have reason to follow conventional morality—but suppose that,
bizarrely, this reason turns out to be entirely epistemic. In this latter world, epistemic norms have authority, and the world is such that following conventional morality makes us likely to have more true beliefs and fewer false beliefs. Now, does this qualification somehow make the latter world fail to be a moral nihilist world after all? Clearly not; there is just as stark an absence of moral reasons in the latter world as in the former. The difference between the two worlds is not that one contains moral reasons while the other does not, but simply that in one world, the domain of epistemic reasons extends more broadly than we might have thought. So, too, for prudence; a world in which our reasons to be moral are entirely prudential is just as morally nihilistic as a world in which our reasons to be moral are entirely epistemic.

To hold that prudence is the basis of morality, then, is to embrace a form of moral nihilism. Why does this matter? For one thing, it makes the view less attractive for those who had been holding onto it in the hope that it would vindicate moral reasons. What’s more, because the view still posits a kind of normative reason, namely prudential reasons, the view lacks the theoretical advantages of a more wholesale normative nihilism (e.g., parsimony and a greater assurance of being naturalistically respectable). If we’re going to concede that there are normative reasons at all, why not include moral reasons among them? The point is especially pressing in light of the first-order normative implications at stake. To hold that prudence is the basis of morality is to hold that my only normative reason for helping others is that there’s something in it for me, such as making me look good to others, making me feel good about myself, and so on. Were I to get a chance to help someone, but where doing so would not likewise help me—for instance, imagine that no one is around to see, that the other lacks the resources to pay me back later, that after I help I’ll immediately be administered a drug that makes me forget about the whole thing, and so on—I would, on the present view, have no reason to help her. That is a consequence that many, myself included, find unacceptable. To be clear, what’s objectionable is not just the verdict that I would lack a reason to help the other—for instance, if such a verdict were delivered
simply as a consequence of a more thoroughgoing normative nihilism, at least there would be
something more principled about it—but the verdict that I lack a reason to help the other and that I
nevertheless have a reason to go on benefiting myself. Such a view is surely too selfish.

It seems to me, then, false that prudence is the basis of morality. Still, there is another way of
using prudence to threaten moral pervasiveness. I have in mind the view that prudence and morality
each have authority, yet that they are wholly separate kinds of authority. This view goes against moral
pervasiveness by positing that, while morality has authority, the authority of prudence is firmly in
competition with it—and that, even when the verdicts of prudence and morality happen to coincide, the
time kinds of authority at play are wholly distinct.50

However, this view is mistaken. The reason why it is mistaken is simple: One’s own well-being,
as I’ll argue in a moment, is morally valuable. Because one’s own well-being is morally valuable, every
prudential reason—that is, every reason grounded in advancing one’s own well-being—is a moral
reason. In this way, prudence is a part or aspect of morality.51 None of this is to say, of course, that we
are always morally obligated to do what prudence recommends; rather, the thought is simply that
prudence generates pro tanto moral reasons. In some or even many cases, the moral reasons generated
by prudence could be outweighed by moral reasons stemming from other sources (e.g., the need to help
others even when doing so comes at some cost to oneself—at least assuming that the help to others is
sufficiently great and the cost to oneself sufficiently minor).52

50 See Sidgwick (1907/1981).

51 For views in this spirit, see Becker (1973a: 366-370), Huemer (2005: 184-186), Scheffler (1992: 118-119), and
Thomson (2008: 79, fn. 5).

52 We should also keep in mind that prudential reasons plausibly take the form of justifying rather than requiring
reasons. To the extent that one’s prudential reasons justify but do not require taking the most prudent course of
action, taking a less prudent course of action (e.g., by sacrificing one’s own interests for the sake of others’) could
be supererogatory. Cf. the brief discussion, on pp. 44-45, of helping an injured stranger being circled by wolves.
Why think that one’s own well-being is morally valuable? We can begin by noting that others’ well-being is morally valuable. Surely others’ well-being provides one with moral reasons. If, for example, by donating a modest amount of money to a local food bank, one could help a needy family avoid going hungry, that no doubt gives one a moral reason to donate the money. But then, if others’ well-being provides one with moral reasons, why wouldn’t one’s own? To maintain that there is after all such a discrepancy would seem arbitrary—no less arbitrary, indeed, than the opposite error made by ethical egoism, namely counting one’s own well-being as morally important but not others’. If, as some think, the weightiest flaw of ethical egoism is that it arbitrarily excludes others from moral consideration, then it’s difficult to see how excluding oneself from moral consideration is any better.\(^{53}\)

But perhaps some will object that excluding one’s own well-being from morality is not arbitrary. In particular, some might propose that morality concerns strictly one’s relations to other people—emphasis on the other. If one is considering harming or helping another, certainly morality bears on that—but as for what one does to oneself? That is simply beyond the purview of morality.\(^{54}\)

Such a view of morality, however, is untenable. The reason is that it faces a non-identity problem. Here’s one way of illustrating the non-identity problem: Imagine that one has a choice between actualizing one of two worlds. Each world contains the same number of people, but which people exist is entirely different; there is no single person who exists in both worlds. Apart from this, the only other salient difference is that in one world, owing to wholly impersonal causes, the people have much worse health, and consequently suffer a great deal more, than the people in the other world do. We might imagine, further, that there is no difference in the cost or effort of choosing to actualize one world over the other; we can picture the choice as simply a matter of pressing one of two buttons.

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\(^{53}\) For the classic exposition of the objection that ethical egoism is unacceptably arbitrary, see Rachels (2007: 85-88).

\(^{54}\) For one defense of this kind of view, see Finlay (2007).
We might now ask whether there would be anything morally at stake in the above choice. And here my intuitions, at any rate, are clear: There is something morally at stake in this choice. In particular, to choose to actualize the world in which the people have worse health, and consequently suffer more, would be morally wrong. Yet the moral wrongness here is not explainable by appealing to one’s relation to other people; after all, in bringing about the more suffering-filled world, I wouldn’t have caused harm to anyone.\textsuperscript{55} Simply choosing to bring (or not bring) someone into existence doesn’t seem to be a way of harming her. Nor, in bringing about the more suffering-filled world, am I making anyone worse off. It’s not as if the people with poor health would be better off if one had chosen to actualize the other world; instead, they simply would not exist.

Surely if the moral wrongness in the above case were a matter of my relation to other people, I would be harming someone or making someone worse off. Yet, as we’ve just seen, in this case I’m neither harming anyone nor making anyone worse off. The moral wrongness here, then, is not a matter of my relation to other people. And in light of this, the view that morality concerns only our relations to others is untenable.

And now, for the crucial question: Since morality isn’t just about one’s relations to others, why not think that it also extends to one’s relation to oneself? There seems to be no principled obstacle to its doing so. And then, as pointed out earlier, morality certainly incorporates other people’s well-being. In the absence of a reason for holding that morality excludes one’s own well-being, it would seem arbitrary to hold that it does. The more plausible conclusion is that just as other people’s well-being matters morally, one’s own well-being matters morally, too.

Yet there are further objections to the view that prudence is morally valuable. One such objection involves cases where it might intuitively seem that prudence is not morally valuable. What are

\textsuperscript{55} Now, if the people’s lives were so bad as to fail to be worth living, perhaps I would be causing the people harm by bringing them into existence. To bracket this worry, we can simply assume that the people’s lives aren’t so bad as to not be worth living.
we to say, for instance, about prudence as applied to a person who is morally very bad—say, a devoted Nazi? Such a person might, for example, use intimidation to try to rid his neighborhood of Jews, and to the extent that he succeeds, that’ll be in his interest, for then he’ll feel more at ease in his neighborhood. Yet such a turn of events hardly seems morally good on that account. Indeed, more than just failing to be morally good, it is in fact morally bad. Do cases like this not challenge my contention that prudence is morally valuable?

As an initial point, it’s not clear to me that the above case in fact involves an increase in well-being. While the Nazi may feel more comfortable in his neighborhood in the absence of Jews, and while feeling more comfortable normally makes for an increase in well-being, the repugnant origin of the feeling in this case calls into doubt whether it makes for an increase in the Nazi’s well-being. A similar doubt applies to many other cases as well. For instance, imagine someone who feels jealous of a colleague’s successes, and secretly desires for her not to be successful. Now suppose that the colleague happens to get passed over for a promotion, and the first person secretly delights in this. Is this a benefit to the first person? At the very least, it’s not obvious that it is. Here we may set this issue aside, though, and see whether there are additional responses to the objection.

My own view is that a person’s well-being matters morally even if that person is a moral monster. That a certain action would further someone’s well-being—even if it turns out to be the well-being of a Nazi—is a pro tanto moral reason in favor of it. Conversely, that a certain action would diminish someone’s well-being, even if that of a Nazi, is a pro tanto moral reason against it. Consider, for example, a Nazi firing squad about to execute some prisoners. Suppose that just as the members of the firing squad are about to pull the trigger, they all get severe stomach cramps and become unable to aim properly. Seizing the opportunity, the prisoners run away. Here I would say that the pain the firing squad
members suffer is *pro tanto* morally bad. The moral badness simply happens to be greatly outweighed by the moral goodness of the prisoners’ escaping.

Of course, this is a controversial view; not everyone will be as sympathetic to it as I am. Fortunately, it is not a view I’m committed to. Suppose we accept that the well-being of moral monsters does not matter morally. Then we can simply say that well-being matters morally only when it belongs to beings who meet a certain threshold of moral virtue or goodness (or at least, not-badness), a threshold that happens to exclude Nazis. When the being in question fails to meet this threshold, its well-being will not matter morally (and, under totalism, will by extension not matter at all). Such a view is consistent with my core claims about the moral value of prudence; all that is added is a qualification about whether one is morally good (or not-bad) enough a person for one’s prudence to matter morally. That the moral value is conditional in this way does not make it any less moral—particularly since what it is conditional on is itself something thoroughly moral.

Here’s a final objection to what I’ve said about prudence and morality. If we posit, as I have, that prudence matters morally, that seems to imply that prudence has some bearing on blameworthiness. Yet one might think that prudence simply has nothing to do with blameworthiness. When people are imprudent, we *criticize* them for it, but such criticism doesn’t have a moral character; we don’t *blame* people for their purely prudential failings. However prudentially bad it might be for a person to, say, maintain an unhealthy diet, or fail to develop her talents, it doesn’t seem that she’d be blameworthy for it. Nor is it merely a superficial lack of blameworthiness—the kind where someone does something that would normally be blameworthy, but given exceptional circumstances, turns out not to be blameworthy (e.g., striking someone because of a spasm in one’s arm). Rather, the lack of blameworthiness is deeper: Even in normal circumstances, when a person is as responsible for what he does as anyone can be, it still

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56 If applying “(morally) bad” to something other than an action sounds strange, we may substitute some other adjective, such as “unfortunate.”
seems inappropriate to blame him for his purely prudential failings. Yet if blame is in this way inappropriate, how could prudence be morally valuable? How could prudential reasons be a kind of moral reason?\(^57\)

I’d like to contest the idea that we cannot be blameworthy for prudential failings. There are at least some cases in which, seeing another’s prudential failing, we do feel inclined to blame her. I especially have in mind cases in which we’re very close to the person who’s making poor prudential decisions. Imagine, for example, that a family member you love dreams of becoming an artist. She has great talent for art, and you know that if she were to continue pursuing her art, she would become a successful artist. More than that, she would be living a life that’s fulfilling to her. Yet alas, rather than following her dream of becoming an artist, she lets it waste away. For no good reason—we might imagine, for instance, that it’s out of sheer laziness—she neglects to keep practicing, to keep producing, to take the steps needed to realize her dream. Instead of living the fulfilling life she could have had, she settles for a stale existence, working menial jobs that leave her unsatisfied. It would seem perfectly natural for you, seeing all this self-wrought stagnation, to say, “How could you do this to yourself?” Or, even if you didn’t say this, you would probably still think it. The attitude would not just be one of sadness or puzzlement, but blame. In crippling her life in this way, she’s done something seriously wrong; the fact that the person she’s harmed happens to be herself seems neither here nor there.

I propose that blame seems justified in this case because you, in being a family member who loves this person, would be able to know better—perhaps by being able to sense especially vividly—what has been lost, what your relative has made herself miss out on. By contrast, if the prudential failing had belonged to a mere stranger, and you simply happened to hear about it secondhand, your sense of what has been lost would not be nearly as powerful. It is for this reason that in the latter case we would be less inclined to blame. Notice, however, that the difference between these cases need not be a

\(^{57}\) Thanks to Rachel Leadon for bringing up this objection.
difference in the seriousness of what has been lost; rather, the difference is simply in how easy it is to perceive the seriousness of what has been lost. And this, it seems, is not something that could ground a difference in the fittingness of blame. Blame is fitting in virtue of the fact that the person has seriously wronged himself; how easy it happens to be for us to perceive the extent of the wrongness is something wholly extrinsic.\(^{58}\)

There is an additional reason why one might be reluctant to blame others for prudential failings. Specifically, one might think that that being blameworthy for Φ-ing entails that one lacks a right to Φ. And however regrettable prudential failings might be, few would say that we don’t have a right to act against our own interest. For my part, I fully agree that we have a right to act against our own interest. What I challenge is the thought that being blameworthy for Φ-ing entails that one lacks a right to Φ. Consider some actions about which we might say, “You had the right to do that, but it wasn’t the right thing to do.” Such actions include breaking minor promises, saying mean things to one’s friends, being stingy with one’s money, and so on. How is it that we have a right to do such actions despite their moral wrongness? The most plausible answer, in my view, is that our having a right to do them simply consists in its being the case that we ought not to be coercively prevented from doing them. More generally, to have a right to Φ is for it to be the case that one ought not to be coercively prevented from Φ-ing. With this account of rights in mind, it’s easy to see why being blameworthy for Φ-ing fails to entail that one lacks a right to Φ. For, as suggested above, there are certain actions that are wrong to do, and thus that one would be blameworthy for doing without excuse, but that one nevertheless ought not to be coercively prevented from doing. Thus, even if, as I hold, one can be blameworthy for one’s prudential failings, that does not entail that one lacks a right to act imprudently.

\(^{58}\) Also worth noting is the following possibility: Even if prudential failings did not call for blame from others, they would still call for blame from oneself. The connection between prudence and blameworthiness would thus be preserved. Cf. Falk (2007: 228).
B. The Standpoint of Instrumental Value

Next, let’s consider the standpoint of instrumental value: that is, the standpoint that recommends doing what will maximally fulfill one’s own ends. Now, some might wonder what the difference is between this and prudence. To those who understand prudence simply as a matter of fulfilling one’s ends, the standpoint of prudence is identical to that of instrumental value. And if indeed the two standpoints are identical, my arguments in the previous subsection will apply here as well; the reasons given by the standpoint of instrumental value will, for the reasons explained above, be moral reasons. But if the two standpoints turn out to be distinct, what then? For the sake of argument, let’s assume that they are in fact distinct. To the extent that the standpoint of instrumental value has authority, are its reasons to any extent moral? I’ll now argue that the answer is “Yes.”

It is at least initially plausible that the standpoint of instrumental value has authority; after all, it seems plausible that end-satisfaction is valuable (perhaps as a component of agents’ well-being). And if that’s right, then it likewise seems plausible that the fact that an action would help satisfy one’s ends is a reason for one to perform it. The important point for present purposes is simply that this reason, whatever other kind it might be, is a moral reason. Why think this? Consider, first, cases in which we have the option of helping another to fulfill his ends. For example, suppose that, while taking a walk on the beach, we come across a child who is building a sandcastle. We see that he is trying to put a final

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59 Thus, the kind of instrumental value at work here is not instrumental value in the broadest sense; it excludes, for example, the sense in which money can be instrumentally valuable for moral ends. The kind of instrumental value discussed in this section has to do simply with whatever fulfills the agent’s ends. One might wonder why I’ve put this in terms of instrumental value rather than instrumental rationality; the reason is that I think “instrumental rationality” more naturally refers to a different normative standpoint, that which is concerned with the agent’s evidence for which actions will maximally fulfill her ends. I discuss the standpoint of instrumental rationality in section III.K.

60 If we posit that end-satisfaction is valuable as a component of agents’ well-being, some might worry that the standpoint of instrumental value is on the verge of collapsing into prudence. But the two standpoints could still be distinct. For it could be the case that, while end-satisfaction is one component of well-being, well-being has additional components. The cumulative force of these additional components might well, in a given case, lead prudence to recommend something different than the standpoint of instrumental value would.
clump of sand on top of a tower—that is his end—yet he cannot quite reach the top on his own. It seems clear that we’d have a reason (even if not a decisive one) to help the child finish his sandcastle, and this reason would be moral. After all, to help the child finish his sandcastle would be an act of kindness. More broadly, this case suggests the following principle: That a certain action would help another to fulfill her ends is a moral reason to perform it.\(^{61}\) This moral reason might be thought of as a reason of kindness; the moral reason to help others to fulfill their ends comes from the fact that this is a way of being kind to others.

And now we might ask a pertinent question: If we have a moral reason to help others fulfill their ends, why would we not likewise have a moral reason to help ourselves fulfill our own ends?\(^{62}\) If helping others fulfill their ends is a way of being kind to them, why wouldn’t helping ourselves fulfill our own ends likewise be a way of being kind to ourselves—and with the moral value that comes with kindness more generally? As we saw in the previous subsection, drawing a moral dividing line between oneself and other people, such that we have moral reasons to benefit others but not ourselves, would be

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\(^{61}\) One might worry that this principle is trivially true; after all, that helping is a morally good activity seems like part of the very concept of helping, no? I believe, however, that this worry is misguided. Were being a morally good activity part of the very concept of helping, then it would make no sense to imagine a world in which (1) moral nihilism is true and (2) people help one another. Yet the stipulation that people help one another does not seem at all in tension with moral nihilism. In a moral nihilist world, people could still help one another; it’s just that such help wouldn’t matter morally. Ultimately, however true it is that it’s morally good to help people, this is not a conceptual truth, but a substantive one. But if one still doesn’t like using the word “help” in this context, one can simply replace it with something else. For instance, we might read “help another to fulfill her ends” as “make it more likely that the other fulfills her ends.”

\(^{62}\) Here, too, one might worry about the use of “helping.” Specifically, is it not pleonastic to say that one helps oneself to fulfill one’s own ends? If, for example, I’m attempting to install a bird feeder in my yard, am I helping myself to install a bird feeder in my yard? As an initial point, note that there are at least some cases in which it does seem apt to describe one as helping oneself. For instance, suppose I have the end of consistently getting up earlier, and, with this end in mind, I decide to place my alarm clock across my room. In doing so, I’m helping myself to fulfill my end of consistently getting up earlier. (We clearly wouldn’t want to say that moving the alarm clock is enough on its own to fulfill my end. But then, it seems that the only other thing left to say is that it’s a way of helping myself to fulfill my end.) Second, we may return to a point from the previous footnote, about how “helping someone to fulfill her ends” can be read as “making it more likely that that person fulfills her ends.” With this in mind, it seems just as legitimate to say that I can help myself fulfill my ends as that I can help others fulfill theirs. When I attempt to install a bird feeder in my yard, I indeed make it more likely that I’ll fulfill my end of installing a bird feeder in my yard. Of course, in normal conversation we wouldn’t spell things out this way, but there does not seem to be anything philosophically problematic about it.
arbitrary. We’re left to conclude, then, that insofar as the standpoint of instrumental value has authority, its reasons are moral reasons.

C. Standpoints Associated with Personal and Family Relationships

The next normative standpoint—or rather, class of normative standpoints—to consider is that associated with personal and family relationships (e.g., the normative standpoint associated with being a good son, a good friend, and so on). It’s plausible that such standpoints have authority. To the extent that they do, however, our reasons for following them are moral reasons. Consider the normative standpoint of being a good parent. Being a good parent is something that parents have not just any kind of duty, but a moral duty to do, insofar as it’s within their ability. For example, a parent who could be responsive to her children’s needs, but chooses not to, is failing morally. The same is true of the normative standpoint of being a good friend. Being a bad friend to someone else—say, by breaking promises, or thoughtlessly neglecting to be there for her when she needs you—is not just any kind of failing, but a moral failing. Of course, none of this is surprising, for at the root of good personal and family relationships are qualities like kindness, respect, and concern for others’ well-being—and these are moral concerns through and through.

It might seem odd to connect morality with personal and family relationships in this way, since some have emphasized how the requirements of such relationships can seem to be at odds with those of morality. Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett (2000), for example, speak of friendship as posing a “moral danger” in that being a good friend can require us to go against morality—for instance, by helping our friend hide the body of someone he’s inadvertently killed. But even if that’s right, there’s no conflict with my claim here. In this section I’m simply claiming that if the demands of friendship and other personal relationships have authority, our reasons for complying with them are (at least) moral reasons. Such a claim is compatible with the possibility that the demands of these relationships sometimes conflict with those of morality. Recall the earlier discussion of how, while the demands of
prudence can conflict with those of morality, prudential reasons are still (at least) moral reasons, since one’s own well-being is morally valuable. In a similar way, the demands of friendship might conflict with those of morality, but our reasons for complying with the former would still be (at least) moral reasons, since much of what constitutes friendship is morally valuable. As Cocking and Kennett themselves (2000: 284) acknowledge, friendship has several morally valuable components, such as “mutual affection” and “the disposition to promote the other’s serious interests and well-being.”

D. The Political Standpoint

Consider, next, the normative standpoint associated with politics. We can think of this standpoint in various ways—for example, as that which centers on achieving a just society, or a society with legitimacy, or some such. Broadly speaking, though, these all come down to one thing: Politics is about structuring the best society for human beings. The most fundamental political concerns are concerns like promoting freedom, furthering well-being, and ensuring fairness. And these concerns are all firmly within the domain of morality. Insofar as a political system is bad, it seems that this is inevitably for moral reasons (e.g., it leads to mass bondage and misery). And insofar as a political system is good, it seems that this, too, is inevitably for moral reasons (e.g., it is a fair system). By all indications, any reasons the political standpoint gives us (perhaps as a collective) are moral reasons.

E. The Aesthetic Standpoint

The next normative standpoint to consider is that of aesthetics. Aesthetic considerations might seem to provide us with normative reasons—for example, something’s being beautiful is a reason for us to

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63 And, if we’re feeling more inclusive, the best society for other sentient life forms, too—perhaps even for the rest of the environment as well.
observe it. Such reasons strike many or most people as purely non-moral, however.\textsuperscript{64} What, then, am I to say about them?

Here I’ll argue that aesthetic considerations are in fact morally weighty. We can see their moral weightiness from considering certain actions. Let’s begin by considering an action that needlessly destroys something of beauty. For example, imagine that there’s a beautiful rock formation, but someone wantonly bulldozes it. We might also imagine that what’s left is just as environmentally useful; the only difference is that it’s now an eyesore. About this action my intuitions are clear: Bulldozing the rock formation is not just an act against beauty, but an act against morality. Such an intuition is reflected in my dispositions, too: For example, I would be inclined to blame the person for effacing the rock formation, and if I had had the chance to advise him before he did so, I would have offered advice intended as a categorical imperative that he leave the rock formation intact. What I propose, then, is that needlessly destroying something of beauty is morally wrong. And the greater the beauty of what’s destroyed, the greater the moral wrongness.

Why might needlessly destroying something of beauty be morally wrong? One plausible answer is that well-being is morally valuable, that aesthetic appreciation is one component of well-being, and that to needlessly destroy something of beauty is to needlessly reduce opportunities for aesthetic appreciation. In this way, the moral value of beauty is tied to the moral value of well-being. I leave it open whether there are additional reasons why needlessly destroying something of beauty is morally wrong; the connection to well-being is simply one reason.

Just as it’s morally wrong to needlessly destroy something of beauty, it seems morally good to bring beauty into the world. Imagine, for instance, that after the person in the previous example bulldozes the rock formation, a wizard comes along and magically restores it. Surely the wizard’s action would be morally good. And the greater the beauty of the rock formation, the greater the moral

\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Schlothfeldt and Schweitzer (2012: 76).
goodness. Again, the reason—or at least, one reason—why this is so has to do with the connection between aesthetic appreciation and well-being: By restoring the rock formation, the wizard would be reintroducing opportunities for aesthetic appreciation and, by extension, for furthering well-being (since aesthetic appreciation is a component thereof). In light of all this, it’s difficult to avoid the conclusion that insofar the aesthetic standpoint gives us reasons, they are (at least) moral reasons.65

Some would hesitate to accept that the aesthetic standpoint could provide moral reasons. One might think, in particular, that it is difficult to come up with cases that lend intuitive support to my view—at any rate, more difficult than I’ve made it seem. To illustrate, return for a moment to the case of the bulldozed rock formation. This case has two features, neither of which has anything to do with beauty, that might be triggering our moral concern. First, bulldozing the rock formation reflects a wantonly destructive character, and we think that to have a wantonly destructive character is morally bad. Second, the person in this case does not have any claim over the rock formation; under the most natural way of imagining the case, the rock formation is in the public domain. And most would agree that it’s morally bad to destroy things that are not yours. Might it be that our moral concern is tracking these features of the case, rather than anything having to do with beauty?

To see whether this is so, the objector might continue, we should try a different case—a case that lacks the above two features. Unfortunately, the first feature seems unavoidable; needlessly destroying something of beauty will, by definition, be wantonly destructive. We should bear that in mind as we go forward. Still, we can come up with a case that lacks the second feature above, that of destroying something that does not belong to you. Imagine that I own a watch that, while not very nice

65 As before, this is not to deny that there are cases in which purely aesthetic considerations recommend one action while morality recommends another. For example, perhaps the aesthetic standpoint recommends that I use my money to buy the art supplies I need to finish my painting, whereas morality recommends that I instead donate the money to charity. Even in cases like this, however, aesthetic considerations still provide pro tanto moral reasons (here, a moral reason to buy the art supplies); it’s simply that these moral reasons are overridden by other moral reasons.
or expensive, has some minimal beauty. Now suppose that one day, I decide to destroy it. We can add a few further stipulations to make the case more illuminating: specifically, that no one else gets any pleasure out of the watch, and that my decision to destroy it will affect no one but myself. Now, in destroying the watch, I remove a very slight amount of beauty from the world. Yet am I thereby doing anything morally wrong? Some would hold that I’m not. After all, I own the watch, so I’m not destroying anything that I don’t have a right to destroy. And even if I am doing something morally wrong here, the beauty at stake seems too minimal to be grounding the moral wrongness. Rather, what would be grounding the moral wrongness would simply be my wantonly destructive character—which, again, evidently has nothing to do with beauty.66

In response, I have a few points. First, there are some moral intuitions about the bulldozer case that the two potential distorting influences—namely, wanton destructiveness and the element of ownership—do not account for. In particular, these influences do not account for the intuition that the greater the rock formation’s beauty is, the more morally wrong it is needlessly to destroy it. After all, whether the beauty of the rock formation is great or miniscule, it is just as wantonly destructive to bulldoze the rock formation without reason. Similarly, how beautiful the rock formation happens to be has no bearing on whether one owns it. Yet for me, at least, there persists the intuition that the moral wrongness of needlessly destroying the rock formation is directly proportional to its beauty. Likewise for the intuition that the greater something’s beauty is, the more morally good it is to bring it about. Now, what would account for these intuitions is if beauty itself (or the proper appreciation thereof) were morally valuable. That is a point against the above debunking explanation and in favor of my view of the case.

Second, while I agree that I have the right to destroy my watch, that does not settle the question of whether destroying my watch is the right thing to do. As touched on earlier, we may

66 I thank Iain Laidley for raising the objection sketched out in this and the previous paragraph.
understand my having a right to destroy my watch as amounting simply to this: I morally ought not to be coercively prevented from destroying my watch. And that is certainly compatible with its being nevertheless morally wrong for me to destroy my watch.

Of course, the objector might grant this but insist that his intuition about the present case remains firm: It is not, in fact, morally wrong for me to destroy my watch. Here I must say that I have a different intuition. My own intuition is that it is morally wrong for me to destroy my watch, if only very slightly. Are we left with a clash of intuitions, then? Fortunately, we are not. There’s still something to be said in favor of my view of the case. Recall the earlier point that aesthetic appreciation is a component of well-being. It seems to follow that insofar as you needlessly destroy things of beauty, even when they are only of minimal beauty, you are needlessly reducing opportunities for furthering well-being (whether your own or others’). And surely that is morally bad (if in some cases only slightly). Not all moral reasons are strong—some moral reasons are very slight, such as when an action would cause someone a nearly imperceptible pain. The present case is no different; just as the fact that an action would cause someone a very slight amount of pain is a very slight moral reason not to perform it, the fact that an action would needlessly destroy a very slight amount of beauty is a very slight moral reason not to perform it. Here as ever, we must not fall into the trap of mistaking a very slight moral reason for an absence of any moral reason at all.

This last point, about how aesthetic appreciation is a component of well-being, might seem to raise the question of whether beauty per se matters morally, or whether it matters morally only when it is appreciated by some observer. In other words, is it really beauty that matters morally here, or is it simply aesthetic appreciation? While now is not the time for an extended discussion of this, I will say
that the latter seems more plausible to me. I would be happy to restrict my claim in this section to the claim that aesthetic appreciation matters morally; that, I think, would be enough for my purposes.67

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I turn now to the second category of non-moral normative standpoints: those which more plausibly lack authority, at least by my lights. For a non-moral normative standpoint to lack authority is, of course, perfectly compatible with moral pervasiveness. Yet sometimes it’s controversial to claim that a certain non-moral normative standpoint lacks authority. In such cases, the claim needs defense, which this section will provide. Moreover, even when a non-moral normative standpoint lacks authority, we might often or even typically have a moral reason to follow its verdicts. When this is the case, I’ll explain why.

F. Etiquette

The first normative standpoint in this category is etiquette. At first glance, it might seem that etiquette has authority. That certain behaviors are required by etiquette gives you a reason to perform them; that other behaviors are prohibited by etiquette gives you a reason not to perform them. For example, when I’m dining with friends, etiquette requires me not to move my face onto my plate and eat my food like a pig. Instead, etiquette requires me to eat my food in whatever manner happens to be socially expected in that context, such as by using a fork and knife. And it certainly feels to me as if I have good reason to opt for the fork-and-knife approach over the porcine alternative. Yet such a reason, most would say, seems non-moral. How might moral totalism account for this?

I’ll certainly concede that we often have reason to do as etiquette demands. That, however, is not because etiquette has an authority of its own; rather, it is because what is required by etiquette is often independently required by morality. After all, much of etiquette amounts to a way of showing

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67 There is also the question of how the moral value of aesthetic appreciation is to be weighed. Is it simply one aspect of a broader utilitarian calculus? Or must we consider other factors, such as how equally it’s distributed? While these are interesting questions in normative ethics, they are beyond the scope of this book.
respect for others. Imagine, for instance, that someone I’m being introduced to extends his hand to me in the gesture of a handshake, but that I choose simply to stand there, refraining from shaking his hand. Here I’d be violating the protocol of etiquette which says that one ought to shake hands with someone one’s being introduced to (especially when the other has already extended his hand). But, crucially, I wouldn’t just be violating a protocol of etiquette here. By intentionally refraining from shaking the other’s hand, I’d also be disrespecting him. And how we (dis)respect others is itself a matter of morality.

Let’s suppose that I have no good reason to refrain from shaking the other’s hand. Then it is morally wrong for me to so refrain. To see why, we need only appeal to a more general moral principle, a principle which says that it’s morally wrong to disrespect others when one has no good reason for doing so. Here, then, I indeed have a reason to do as etiquette requires and shake the other’s hand, but it is a moral reason.

Moreover, there are often prudential reasons to do as etiquette demands. When we behave comme il faut (for example, by returning handshakes, respecting others’ personal space, not cutting in line, and so on), other people are more likely to respect us, help us, and be friends with us. And, as we saw above, prudence is a part of morality; to have a prudential reason to Φ is ipso facto to have a moral reason to Φ. That etiquette bears on prudence, then, only strengthens its connection to morality.

When we have no moral or prudential reason to follow etiquette, however, it is difficult to see what reason there would be to follow etiquette at all. That etiquette has no authority seems especially clear in cases where we have good reason to go against what etiquette demands. Imagine, for example, that I’m a rich person in a society where it’s frowned upon for the rich to be friends with the poor. Such a social norm, it seems, would not by itself give me any reason to refrain from being friends with someone who’s poor.

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68 Forcehimes and Semrau (2018: Sec. 2.1), Shiffrin (1999: 790, fn. 25), and Wodak (2018: 16) make a similar point.
What about more neutral cases—cases in which etiquette counsels something that I have no independent reason to do or to refrain from doing? Here, too, it seems implausible that etiquette could provide me with normative reasons. Why would the mere fact that my community tends to expect a certain behavior in a certain situation give me a reason to perform that behavior in that situation? To suppose that it would, would seem to make the generation of reasons too easy or trivial a matter. For example, imagine that I’m having dinner with a friend at my apartment, and that neither of us cares a whit about etiquette. Does etiquette give me a reason to, say, start with the outermost cutlery here? My overwhelming intuition is that I lack any such reason. Etiquette can insist all it wants that I ought to start with the outermost cutlery, but here the dictates of etiquette simply don’t matter.

G. Standpoints Associated with Professional Roles

The next family of normative standpoints is that affiliated with various professional roles—for example, the normative standpoint of being a good doctor, a good lawyer, or a good accountant. Evidently, we often or even typically have good reason to follow the verdicts of the standpoint associated with our profession. If, for instance, I’m a dentist, I have good reason to perform my dental checkups well. To some, such reasons might seem non-moral. Here, though, I’ll argue that the reasons associated with this kind of standpoint are in fact moral reasons.

Why claim this? There are two reasons. First, consider the role of agreements or contracts. When one is employed in a certain profession, that is almost always because one has agreed to a contract specifying one’s duties. For instance, when one becomes a professor, one agrees to teach certain classes, to advise students, to perform at least minimal service to the department through committee work, and so on. Neglecting to fulfill these professional duties, then, is a violation of one’s contract, a breaking of one’s promise. And to break a promise in this way is clearly a morally relevant feature of an action. Specifically, it is a morally wrong-making feature of an action.
Second, in many or most cases, to fulfill one’s professional duties well is to do things that are independently morally good. When a doctor saves a patient’s life, for instance, the doctor is not simply fulfilling her professional duty to do what she can for the patient’s health, but is doing something morally good in itself. Of course, some might say that that example seems cherry-picked. The point generalizes, however, more widely than one might expect. Consider a civil engineer who designs a road or bridge in the safest way, the way that minimizes the chance of unnecessary deaths; a police officer who works to deter crime without using excessive force; a bus driver who acts quickly to save his passengers in a dangerous situation; a teacher who inspires her students. In all these cases and more, excelling at one’s profession involves doing things that are independently morally good.

What if neither of the above elements are present, though? That is, what are we to say about cases in which (1) one is employed in a certain profession without having made an agreement or contract for it, and (2) following the verdicts of the standpoint associated with one’s profession does not involve doing anything independently morally good? Does one still have a reason to follow the verdicts of the standpoint associated with one’s profession? I think that the answer is negative. Of course, it’s difficult even to imagine a case of an occupation that meets (1) and (2) above. But insofar as we can imagine such cases, the intuitive verdict is that the standpoint associated with one’s occupation does not provide any reasons. Imagine, for example, that a certain toll road booth has its own social media coordinator. Let’s imagine, further, that (1) the booth serves no important purpose, and, (2) given an administrative error, the social media coordinator never in fact signed any contract or agreed that he’d fulfill the job duties; he simply showed up one day and started working (and happened to start getting paid). A bizarre case, to be sure—but then, the very stipulations with which we began practically guarantee that whatever case we imagine will be bizarre. The question for now is whether the social media coordinator here would have a reason to follow the verdicts of the standpoint associated with his profession—in this case, to promote his toll booth on the various social media platforms. And it seems
to me the only reasons he could have to do so would be prudential reasons, such as the fact that doing so gets him paid, that he enjoys the work (if indeed he does), and so on. But such reasons, of course, do not suggest that his profession’s standpoint has any authority; rather, the normative import here comes from prudence (and thus, ultimately from morality, on my view). To minimize or cancel such reasons of prudence, we might further suppose that he would be making more money and enjoying his life more if he were doing anything else. Now, with all that in place, we might return to our earlier question: Does the social media coordinator here have a reason to follow the verdicts of the standpoint associated with his profession? It seems to me that the answer can only be negative; he has no reason to keep promoting the toll both on social media. So, too, for professions more broadly: Whenever we have reasons to act as directed by the standpoint associated with our profession, it is not because such a standpoint itself has any authority; rather, the reasons stem from elsewhere. In the absence of such exogenous reasons, we have no reason to act as directed by the standpoint associated with our profession.

H. Standpoints Associated with Games

Next, let’s consider the normative standpoints associated with games. From chess to football, games involve sets of rules and guidelines for how one should play—rules and guidelines that together amount to a normative standpoint for each game. For example, the normative standpoint associated with chess says, *inter alia*, that one should castle early; the normative standpoint associated with football says, *inter alia*, that one should avoid fumbling the ball; and so on. Now, the normative standpoints associated with the various games are often taken to lack authority; they’re apt to strike us as frivolous or trivial in a way that other normative standpoints, such as prudence and epistemic rationality, are not. Still, one might think that in some cases the normative standpoint of a certain game can provide us with reasons, particularly if we’re already playing the game. It might be an open question whether we have
reason to play the game in the first place—but if we’re already playing, don’t we have reason to adhere to the rules of the game? And if so, wouldn’t this be a non-moral reason?

As before, we need to be careful about specifying the source of the reasons. As discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes one has good reasons to follow (or at least, not to flagrantly flout) the standpoint associated with the game one’s playing. My earlier example involved my playing a soccer game with friends when, seeing an opening to score, I realize that I could instead simply dance like a chicken. The point of that example, adapted to the present context, was this: While I indeed have reason to try for the goal rather than dance like a chicken here, it is ultimately a moral reason. After all, to dance like a chicken rather than trying for the goal would be to disrespect my teammates. If we’re going to investigate whether the standpoints associated with games have authority, then, we must set aside cases like this. That is, we must focus on cases in which (1) the standpoint associated with a game directs us to Φ, and (2) we have no moral reason to Φ.

For one such case, let’s imagine that I’m playing chess with myself. Since I’m the only one playing, there’s no potential for disrespecting any teammates. Now, the standpoint of chess tells me that I ought to refrain from moving my pieces in ways that go against the rules (e.g., moving a rook diagonally). But does the standpoint of chess thereby give me any reason to follow this verdict? It seems not. There’s something odd in the thought that a mere game could generate normative reasons—even if I’m already playing it. Perhaps some would say, “But past a certain extent, if you fail to adhere to the rules of the game, you’ll cease to be playing the game at all. If you simply decide to move your chess pieces willy-nilly, then you’ll no longer be playing chess.” Here, though, it seems to me that the only fitting response is “So what?” Whether I happen to be playing the same game still seems like too trivial a matter to generate a normative reason.69

None of this, of course, is to suggest that games are always trivial, or that there is never a reason to become deeply invested in a game. And being deeply invested in a game can look a great deal like treating the rules and guidelines of the game as if they have authority; just imagine someone competing in the Olympics, say, or striving to become a chess champion. I acknowledge that there are at least sometimes good reasons to treat a game this way; I simply hold that these reasons don’t come from the game itself, but from more general values that the game can allow one to realize—values like skill, achievement, learning, enjoyment, and sportsmanship. Take chess, for example: All chess itself is, is the activity of moving the chess pieces around the board (1) in ways allowed by the rules while (2) attempting to checkmate one’s opponent without getting checkmated oneself. Surely what matters about a commitment to playing chess well is not that, but the values mentioned above.

I. Logic

Next, we should consider logic. Isn’t logic a normative standpoint with authority, a standpoint that gives us reasons—for example, reasons to adhere our beliefs and arguments to logical norms? If we believe “P” and “If P, then Q,” that seems to give us a reason to believe Q (or, alternatively—particularly if Q is very implausible—to give up one of the premises). And this might seem like a purely non-moral reason.

Appearances here are deceptive, however. Indeed, as I’ll now argue, it’s not simply that logic has no authority; rather, logic is not a normative standpoint at all. Logic dictates simply which kinds of inferences are truth-preserving, and this is a wholly descriptive matter. Logic itself does not dictate anything normative, such as which inferences we should employ in our thinking.70 For example, logic tells us that contradictions cannot be true, but it does not itself tell us to avoid believing in contradictions.

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70 For further discussion of how norms of reasoning differ from the truths of logic, see Harman (1986).
Some might retort that when our beliefs are logically inconsistent, we’re clearly making a mistake—and, as the notion of being mistaken is normative, it seems to follow that logic itself is normative. In response, let me first acknowledge that having logically inconsistent beliefs is indeed almost always a mistake. But what makes it a mistake, when it is, is not the mere fact that at most one of the beliefs can be true. Rather, the source of the mistake is that one almost always wants or intends to have logically consistent beliefs, or has other ends that would be served by having logically consistent beliefs. In such cases, to have logically inconsistent beliefs is to go against one’s own ends. But such a mistake has nothing to do with logic per se. Instead, the mistake can be accounted for purely within the standpoint of instrumental value: that is, the standpoint that tells one to do what maximally promotes one’s own ends. In a bizarre case in which one did not intend to have, or have ends that would be served by having, logically consistent beliefs, to believe in logical inconsistencies would be no mistake at all; it would simply have the (wholly non-normative) upshot that at most one of the relevant beliefs could be true.\textsuperscript{71}

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The final category of non-moral normative standpoints is those whose plausibility of having authority is unclear. Of course, if it turns out that the standpoints discussed in this section lack authority, then they pose no threat whatsoever to moral pervasiveness. I’ll argue, however, that even if we assume that the standpoints discussed here indeed have authority, their reasons are moral reasons.

\textbf{J. The Law}

To begin, let’s consider the law. The law might seem to have authority. Consider statements of the form “Do X; it’s the law.” Yet even if the law does have authority, its reasons are (at least) moral reasons. To see why, consider that there are, broadly speaking, two views of the relation between law and morality:

legal positivism and natural law theory. My claim is that each view is consistent with moral
pervasiveness. Let’s begin with natural law theory. According to natural law theory, the institution of
law has a natural function: securing justice. And laws (or “laws”) that fail to fulfill this function—for
instance, laws condoning slavery—do not count as genuine laws. To use Aquinas’s dictum, “Lex iniusta
non est lex”; an unjust law is no law at all. If this is the right view, then it is difficult to imagine a truer
reflection of moral pervasiveness than law. Our reasons to follow the law would be reasons to act in
accordance with a system that furthers justice—and that seems to be about as moral a reason as any.

Accordingly, natural law theory might seem to be an especially easy case for illustrating moral
pervasiveness. Things might not seem so easy when it comes to legal positivism. Legal positivism is the
view that facts about what the law says are merely descriptive facts. On this view, the content of the law
is independent of justice or morality; a law’s being unjust does not at all suggest that it’s not in fact a
law. For example, on one version of legal positivism, laws are orders backed by force; a law mandating
racial segregation on buses, for instance, is simply a standing order for members of one race not to sit
beyond their assigned area, where anyone violating this directive stands to be punished for doing so
(such as by fines or imprisonment).72 Other versions of legal positivism, such as H. L. A. Hart’s
(1961/2012), are more nuanced, but they all share the thesis that the content of the law is a purely
descriptive matter. Now let us imagine that legal positivism is true; what are we to say about the
relation between morality and law? Is the law still a reflection of moral pervasiveness?

Even under the assumption of legal positivism, I claim that law remains a reflection of moral
pervasiveness. It simply reflects moral pervasiveness in a different way than it would if natural law
theory were true. To see how, recall that moral pervasiveness is the fact that any reason, whatever
other kind it might be, is at least a moral reason. As we saw earlier, if natural law theory is true, then we
indeed have reason to follow the law—it’s simply that these reasons turn out to be moral. By contrast, if

72 See Austin (1832/1998).
legal positivism is true, then, as I’ll argue in a moment, we need not have a reason of any kind to follow the law. And that, of course, is entirely compatible with moral pervasiveness. The claim of moral pervasiveness—that any normative standpoint is either a source of moral reasons or fails to be a source of any reasons at all—is preserved.

Why, if legal positivism is true, would the law not by itself give us any reason to follow it? Here it helps to consider frivolous or unjust laws. (To bracket considerations of prudence, we should also add that the laws are unenforced, so breaking them will not lead you to be punished.) For example, imagine that it’s illegal to photograph ducks, and that there’s no good reason for this to be a law. Now suppose that you find yourself with the opportunity to photograph some ducks. Does the mere fact that this law is on the books give you a reason not to photograph the ducks? It seems not. To suppose the contrary would, to repeat an earlier point, make the generation of normative reasons too trivial a matter. Even if there are good reasons to refrain from photographing ducks, the mere fact that doing so is against the law would not be among such reasons.

What, then, of statements of the form “Do X; it’s the law”? While such statements, and the seriousness with which they’re apt to be uttered, might seem to suggest that the law has authority, in fact we can make sense of all this by appealing to other kinds of reasons. In particular, given the connection between the law and punishment, following the law is often a matter of prudence (and, by extension, morality). Particularly when it comes to laws that are well enforced and that carry significant penalties for being violated, it is in one’s own interest to be lawful. I take this to be the force behind utterances of the form “Do X; it’s the law.” The thought is simply “Do X; if you get caught failing to do X, you’ll suffer the consequences.” Moreover, there will often be other, equally obvious moral reasons to follow the law. Many of the actions prohibited by the law—actions such as theft, libel, and murder—are also prohibited by morality. Even if what the law says is a purely descriptive matter, then, we can still account for why we often or typically have reason to comply with the law.
K. The Standpoint of Instrumental Rationality

Next, let’s consider the standpoint of instrumental rationality: the standpoint that recommends doing what your evidence suggests will maximally fulfill your ends. Note that, in emphasizing evidence in this way, the standpoint of instrumental rationality differs from that of instrumental value. An agent who does what her evidence suggests will best fulfill her ends is being instrumentally rational—even if it turns out that what would in fact fulfill her ends (i.e., what would be recommended by the standpoint of instrumental value) is something very different. While there might well be something unfortunate in the fact that she fails to choose what will in fact fulfill her ends, she is not irrational; her mental functioning does not suffer from any defect.

Instrumental rationality is often taken to have authority. The idea is that, if I have an end, then I have a reason—a non-moral reason—to take what the evidence suggests is the means to that end. For example, suppose that I’m thirsty, and I thus form the end of getting a glass of water to drink. Now imagine that my evidence suggests that the most efficient means to this end is to walk into my kitchen and pour a glass of water. According to the standpoint of instrumental rationality, I thereby have a reason to walk into my kitchen and pour a glass of water. Yet intuitively, at least, such a reason is non-moral. What am I to say, then, about the standpoint of instrumental rationality?

As an initial point, notice that, despite the superficial similarity of the two standpoints, the standpoint of instrumental rationality does not seem to inherit any reasons from that of instrumental value. Earlier I argued that we necessarily have a reason to follow the standpoint of instrumental value—that is, to act so as to fulfill our own ends. The reason, I claimed, is that doing so is a way of being kind to ourselves. Yet this source of our reasons to follow the former standpoint does not apply to the latter. That is, while following the standpoint of instrumental value is a way of being kind to ourselves, following the standpoint of instrumental rationality need not be. We can see this most clearly by considering a case in which instrumental value and instrumental rationality come apart: a case in which
one’s evidence about what will fulfill one’s own ends is misleading. To borrow (and slightly modify) a classic example from Bernard Williams (1979/2012: 38), imagine that I have the end of quenching my thirst, and in order to fulfill this end, I set out to drink some water. I grab a glass of what appears to be water, intending to drink it—but, unbeknownst to me, the liquid in the glass is in fact gasoline. To apply this example to the present context, we might ask: In taking a swig of the gasoline, am I being kind to myself? Surely not, for not only does this fail to fulfill my end of quenching my thirst, but it goes against other ends I have, such as maintaining my health and not experiencing intensely unpleasant tastes. If the liquid were water, things would be different; drinking the liquid would then fulfill my end of quenching my thirst, and would in that way manifest kindness to myself. But as it stands, my action of drinking the liquid manifests no kindness to myself; at most, it is a failed attempt at something that would have counted as an instance of kindness to myself. To follow the standpoint of instrumental rationality, then—which, as this example shows, does not always deliver the same verdict as the standpoint of instrumental value—need not manifest kindness to oneself. If the standpoint of instrumental rationality is to give us any reasons, it will have to be through some way other than the value of kindness to oneself.

Might there be other ways in which the standpoint of instrumental rationality could give us reasons? At the very least, it’s not obvious whether there are. And if indeed there aren’t—that is, if the standpoint of instrumental rationality turns out not to give us any reasons—then that is of course perfectly compatible with moral pervasiveness. The interesting question for present purposes is this: On the assumption that the standpoint of instrumental rationality does give us reasons, would its reasons be moral? The answer, I’ll now argue, is affirmative.

How can we make sense of reasons of instrumental rationality as moral? One plausible answer is to tie instrumental rationality to self-respect. In the above example, I suggested that drinking the gasoline fails to be a way of being kind to oneself. Yet notice that it still seems to reflect positively on the
agent in some way. While the action itself may go wrong, it nevertheless reveals something important about the agent’s character. In particular, the agent who follows what her evidence suggests will fulfill her ends is thereby taking her own ends seriously, treating them as if they’re important or worth fulfilling. And in that way, she treats herself—herself as a valuing being, a being who is to be largely identified by and with her ends—as important; in short, she manifests self-respect. This point is easy to overlook when it comes to mundane ends, such as quenching one’s thirst—though even there, it’s still present. Much easier it is to see when we consider more remarkable or life-defining ends, the kind of end people sometimes refer to as their “dream.” For instance, imagine that two persons have the end of becoming a famous author—when people ask them what they intend to do with their life, that is their sincere answer—yet only one of them follows what her evidence suggests will make the fulfillment of that end more likely. One of the two writes ten hours every day, meticulously revising drafts, seeking new opportunities for submissions, taking courses in writing, and so on. The other, meanwhile, spends most of each day watching TV, playing video games, and aimlessly browsing the internet. Surely the assiduous efforts of the first person treat her end of becoming a famous author with much more seriousness, and thereby manifest much greater self-respect, than do the couch-potato ways of the second person. And the importance of self-respect is, of course, moral. In this way, it is plausible that taking one’s own ends seriously—by following what one’s evidence suggests will fulfill one’s own ends—matters morally. Should the standpoint of instrumental rationality give us reasons at all, its reasons are moral reasons, and in that way they are yet another reflection of moral pervasiveness.

L. Standpoints Associated with Religions and Theologies

73 This is not to imply that this person is satisfied with this state of affairs. Perhaps at the end of each day, he looks back in self-loathing at the way he keeps neglecting his dream. Indeed, since we’re stipulating that becoming a famous author is his end (rather than, say, merely a desire or “wouldn’t it be cool if…” prospect), it’s difficult to imagine how he wouldn’t be at least occasionally consumed by such feelings.
For the next normative standpoint, we might turn to religion and theology. That is, we should consider the normative standpoint associated with God’s laws or commandments. Of course, we might well be atheists, as I am. Still, many have held the view that God issues authoritative commands. At least for the sake of argument, then, it’s worth considering what it would be like for there to be a God who issues authoritative commands. Would our reasons to follow such commands be moral, or would they simply be non-moral?

Here the answer seems clear: Major religions overwhelmingly depict God as issuing moral commands, rather than commands that are in some important sense separate from morality. Among the qualities standardly attributed to God is omnibenevolence, or moral perfection, which would entail that God cannot (or at least, does not) command anything contrary to morality. And, at a more concrete level, we see that Judaism and Christianity, at least, view morality itself as a matter of following God’s commands. The hallmark of this is the Ten Commandments, which include classic moral prescriptions (e.g., “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery”) alongside commands to follow God’s will in other ways (e.g., “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”). The text contains no suggestion that these commands are separate in kind; rather, they are all presented as equally imperative, as equally God-given, and as equally moral.

Indeed, following God’s commands is presented as morally obligatory even in the case of God’s ordering Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The conflict here is not depicted as between God and morality—as if God, in His perfect goodness, were to be interpreted as commanding Abraham to do something immoral. Rather, the conflict consists of two sides, on one of which is God and morality—the two are seen as going together—and on the other of which is Abraham’s love for Isaac. By being willing to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham demonstrates that his devotion to God is ultimately greater even than his

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74 Note how God Himself emphasizes Abraham’s love for Isaac—calling him not just “thy [Abraham’s] son,” but “thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest” (Genesis 22:2, JKV)—almost as if to make the choice all the more painful for Abraham, and in that way to further test Abraham’s faith.
wish to let his son live. This pleases God—not because Abraham’s devotion to God makes him willing to
do something immoral, but because, on this picture, being maximally devoted to God is what is moral.

In other religions, the will of God (or the gods) is not seen as having any moral import—but in at
least some such cases, there’s not any pretension to any authority whatsoever. The will of the ancient
Greek gods, for example, is presented not as something that mortals are morally obligated to respect,
but simply as a powerful force that mortals may go along with or resist. (Recall how the Odyssey depicts
Poseidon as an antagonist. His will is to thwart Odysseus, but the text contains no suggestion that this
gives Odysseus any reason to abandon his plans.)

Of course, there are countless religions and theologies, and here I cannot begin to consider all of
them. Admittedly, some of them may well depict the will of God (or the gods) as having an authority
wholly separate from morality. I think it’s fair to say, however, that the burden of proof would be very
much on the one proposing such a theology. The normative standpoint associated with such a theology
is indeed incompatible with moral pervasiveness, but unless we’re given a compelling case for accepting
such a theology in the first place, its corresponding standpoint is simply not salient enough to put much
pressure on the case for moral pervasiveness. (In this respect, the standpoint would be like any of the
infinitely many others we could posit that are incompatible with moral pervasiveness, but that we’ve
thus far, at least, been given no reason to accept.) Setting such standpoints aside, we may provisionally
conclude that the normative standpoints associated with religions and theologies, like the other
normative standpoints considered here, seem to reflect moral pervasiveness (in that the will of God, or
of the gods, is seen either as giving moral reasons or as giving no reasons whatsoever).

M. Epistemic Rationality

For the final normative standpoint to be considered here, let’s look at epistemic rationality. By this I
mean the normative standpoint that recommends reasoning well, believing in accordance with one’s
evidence, and so on. The standpoint of epistemic rationality is often taken to have authority—for
example, we have a reason to apportion our credences to the evidence—yet its reasons would appear to be non-moral. If I perceive a chair in front of me, and thereby (as many hold) come to have a reason to believe that there is a chair in front of me, where’s the moral significance in that?

Not everyone, however, believes that epistemic rationality has authority. On one plausible (or, at the very least, respectable) view, put forth by Susanna Rinard (2017), our having evidence that \( p \) need not give us any reason to believe \( p \).\(^{75}\) Rather, what gives us a reason to believe \( p \) is the same kind of consideration that gives us reasons to do anything else. For example, if we have most reason to eat a balanced diet just in case it maximizes expected value, then we have most reason to believe \( p \) just in case it maximizes expected value. Rinard thus calls her view *equal treatment*.

In defense of equal treatment, Rinard argues that it is more parsimonious than the most salient alternative, namely *evidentialism*, which holds that epistemic rationality has authority. According to evidentialism, we have reason to believe \( p \) (only) to the extent that we have evidence for \( p \). The picture evidentialism leaves us with, then, is one in which beliefs have a kind of normativity distinct from that of actions; what gives us reasons for belief is very different from what gives us reasons for action. Equal treatment, by contrast, says that the normativity that applies to beliefs is the same kind of normativity that applies to actions, and is in that way more parsimonious (Rinard 2017: 123-124). Rinard argues, further, that equal treatment can more readily make sense of cases where non-evidential factors give us reasons for belief. For example, suppose a patient is recovering from a serious illness, and his prognosis gives little reason for hope. But suppose he also knows that those who believe they will make a full recovery thereby improve their chances of doing so. It seems that this gives him a reason to believe that he’ll make a full recovery, even though this belief goes against his evidence (Rinard 2017: 126).

Evidentialism, in insisting that reasons for belief are provided only by the evidence, seems hard pressed

\(^{75}\) For another view according to which epistemic rationality has no authority, see Tännö (2010: Ch. 8).
to explain this. Equal treatment, on the other hand, can explain it easily; just as improving one’s expected well-being provides reasons for other actions, so, too, does it provide reasons for belief.

Rinard’s is a bold view, and, like all bold views, it faces its fair share of objections. Here I’ll consider only a few, particularly those stemming from some recent work by Nomy Arpaly (2017). One such objection begins with the following case:

[I]Imagine for a moment that you suffer from cancer. Imagine that you do not yet know if the course of treatment you have undergone will save you or not. You sit down at your doctor’s desk, all tense, aware that at this point there might be only interim news – indications that a good or a bad outcome is likely. The doctor starts with “well, there are reasons to be optimistic”. Though you are still very tense, you perk up and you feel warm and light all over. You ask what the reasons are. In response, the doctor hands you a piece of paper: ironclad scientific results showing that optimism is good for the health of cancer patients. Your heart sinks. You feel like a victim of the cruelest jest.

Under equal treatment, our reasons to believe are practical through and through. When the doctor tells you that you have reason to be optimistic, she says something straightforwardly true (assuming that optimism is indeed good for cancer patients’ health). But if that’s the right view of the case, then why would it feel to you that something has gone so wrong? As Arpaly puts it:

[I]In some situations, receiving practical reasons when one wants epistemic reasons is so incredibly disappointing, so not to the point, and even if the practical reasons are really, really good, the best ever, it is absurd to expect that any comfort, even nominal comfort, be thereby provided to the seeker of epistemic reasons. What the doctor seems to offer and what she delivers seem incredibly different. The seeming depth of this difference needs to be addressed by anyone who emphasizes the idea that a reason is a reason is a reason.

To be sure, Arpaly doesn’t suggest that equal treatment cannot account for this case, but neither does she seem optimistic. The thought is that the above case presents a clear challenge to equal treatment. Let me now say, then, why I think that equal treatment has a ready response here. As an initial point, it’s significant that the person in the example is a doctor rather than a philosopher. Or at least, the way the example is presented makes it seem unlikely that the doctor is also a philosopher. (Most doctors, after all, are not philosophers, and we’re not given any indication that the doctor in this
example is any different.) When people in general—thus, primarily non-philosophers, including doctors—say things like “There’s reason to believe X,” what they usually mean is that there’s good evidence in favor of X. Practical reasons to believe, by contrast, are not brought up as often. To be sure, within the philosophy seminar room, a statement about reasons to believe is liable to be met with queries about whether the speaker has in mind practical or evidential considerations; in nearly all other contexts, however, statements about reasons to believe are most naturally interpreted as referring to evidential considerations. Thus, when the doctor in the above case tells you that there’s reason to be optimistic about your cancer prognosis, that naturally leads you to assume that he means there’s good evidence that the prognosis isn’t so bad. And that would be great news for you—so, of course, that’s what you hope to hear. When you in fact hear that he simply meant that it’d make your cancer prognosis turn out better if you were to believe it isn’t so bad, your heart sinks—because that news, after all, is not nearly as good for you. And the fact that it’s not nearly as good news for you holds true regardless of whether all epistemic reasons are practical reasons. There’s nothing about the case, then, that puts pressure on us to reject equal treatment. Equal treatment can account for our intuitions in this kind of case just as well as any other view.

Arpaly raises an additional, more challenging objection, however. This new objection holds that it’s impossible to believe something purely for practical reasons. For example, if I were offered a million dollars to believe that Memphis is the capital of Tennessee, that would presumably give me a great

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Note that even if equal treatment is true, these people need not be mistaken—or at least, not mistaken in the sense that they think there is a reason to believe X when in fact there is no such reason. They need not be mistaken because practical reasons to believe tend to correlate with the evidence. (For example, believing in accordance with my evidence about bus schedules will tend to help me get to work on time.) Of course, sometimes practical reasons to believe come apart from the evidence; if equal treatment is true, then when this happens, ordinary people, in saying “There’s reason to believe X,” will be mistaken. But even here, the mistake is not as grave as one might worry. In particular, the mistake seems to be less about what “reason to believe” means than simply about what reasons there are to believe various things. (Were the mistake about what “reason to believe” means, then presumably ordinary people would greet with sheer incomprehension any suggestion that there are such things as practical reasons to believe, and it seems implausible that this is how most would react to such a suggestion.)
practical reason to so believe. Yet try as I might, I simply could not will myself to believe that Memphis is the capital of Tennessee, even if I were offered a million dollars to do so. This is a problem for equal treatment because one can have a practical reason to Φ only if Φ-ing is something one could do voluntarily. That our beliefs are not under our voluntary control, then, entails that, pace Rinard, we cannot have practical reasons to believe. While we can have practical reasons to make ourselves have a certain belief (e.g., by surrounding ourselves with other people who believe it), this is not the same thing as having practical reasons to believe.

Rather than attempt to refute this objection, I’d like to take a more concessive approach. Let us grant that one can have a practical reason to Φ only if Φ-ing is in one’s voluntary control, that we lack voluntary control over our beliefs, and, thus, that we lack practical reasons to believe. I think that equal treatment, or at least a view that is in much the same spirit, can accommodate these concessions. All we have to do is recast equal treatment, along with epistemic reasons more broadly, in terms of reasons to make ourselves believe. Under this new view, which we might call equal treatment*, we have reasons to make ourselves believe various things, and these reasons are all practical. Equal treatment* also holds that our merely having evidence that p does not give us a reason to believe p; in this way, equal treatment* rejects the existence of reasons grounded in evidence. By extension, it rejects the existence of reasons to believe (since reasons to believe, under the present concessions, are given entirely by one’s evidence). Yet equal treatment* need not be seen as a form of nihilism about epistemic reasons. It’s simply that epistemic reasons must now be understood not as reasons to believe, but as reasons to make ourselves believe. As such, they are a subset of practical reasons, yet plausibly a subset that remains distinctive and interesting enough to warrant its own label. Most important for my purposes is that equal treatment*, in seeing epistemic reasons as a subset of practical reasons, is compatible with moral pervasiveness. I’ve argued above that other practical reasons, such as reasons of prudence, instrumental value, and instrumental rationality, are moral reasons. To the extent that these kinds of
practical reasons, along with the more paradigmatic moral reasons, likewise serve as reasons to make ourselves believe, epistemic reasons will themselves be moral reasons as well.

Some might worry that there could, for all I’ve said, be a wholly non-moral kind of practical reason, and that this non-moral kind of practical reason could serve as a reason to make ourselves believe. If this were the case, then at least some epistemic reasons would be wholly non-moral, and the claim of moral pervasiveness would be false. Yet one of my hopes for this chapter has been to show just how difficult it is to come up with a kind of practical reason that is wholly non-moral. If, as I argue, all the salient kinds of practical reasons are moral, that dampens the worry that there might be a wholly non-moral kind of practical reason that serves as a reason to make ourselves believe. At the very least, the burden of proof will be firmly on the one who suspects that there is such a kind of reason.

Of course, equal treatment (whether in its original form or as equal treatment*) is a controversial view, and it may well be false. For the sake of argument, let’s assume that it is, and that having evidence that \( p \) itself gives us a reason to believe \( p \). As I’ll now try to show, epistemic rationality would reflect moral pervasiveness even under these assumptions. To see how, we might consider a few thought experiments. First, imagine that I can, through magic, give others a disposition to reason better or worse than they currently do, and that I’m now considering whether to give someone one of these two dispositions. It seems to me that, other things equal, it would be morally wrong for me to give the disposition to reason worse. Giving the disposition to reason better, by contrast, seems morally good—or, even if we’re skeptical that it’s morally good, surely we can at least say that it’s morally better than giving the disposition to reason worse. How might we explain this moral difference? One promising explanation is that there’s something morally valuable about epistemic rationality (or its proper exercise).

Here an immediate objection will arise: Aren’t there alternative, more plausible explanations of the moral wrongness (or at least worseness) of giving the disposition to reason worse? For example,
most people want to be epistemically rational; if the person in question here is like most people, then, to give her the disposition to reason worse would be to go against her desires, which is plausibly a morally bad-making feature. Also, for most people, being less epistemically rational will make them less able to satisfy their own ends; this, too, contributes to the moral wrongness or worseness of giving the disposition to reason worse. And neither of these explanations suggests that epistemic rationality itself is morally valuable. It’s simply that, in the kind of world we live in, epistemic rationality is indirectly bound up with other things that are morally important (viz., people’s desires and capacity for satisfying their own ends).

To emphasize the point, one might propose a modified version of the earlier thought experiment. As before, we start with the choice of whether to give someone a disposition to reason better or a disposition to reason worse. But suppose that, unlike most people, this is someone who has no desire to be epistemically rational. Let’s also suppose that she has no ends that being epistemically irrational will interfere with. To be sure, this is a difficult case to imagine. In the interest of being as charitable as we can, though, let’s see if we can set that aside for now. To the extent that we can imagine the case, we might ask, “Would it be morally wrong (or worse) to give this person a disposition to reason worse?” And the answer, the thought goes, is that this would not be morally wrong (or worse), and that this result suggests that epistemic rationality itself is not morally valuable.

In response to this objection, I’ll begin with a concession, of sorts. It would not, I agree, be morally wrong (or worse) to give such a person a disposition to reason worse—but only if epistemic rationality has no authority. If we assume that epistemic rationality does have authority, then it seems to me that it would be morally wrong (or worse) to give the disposition to reason worse, even to a person like the one in the above example. For then I would be interfering with the person’s capacity to do something she has reason to do, and that seems to make a moral difference—regardless of whether the kind of reasons at play, in this case epistemic reasons, antecedently strikes us as moral or non-
moral. In this way, for epistemic rationality to have authority would itself be morally significant; it would, if I’m correct, have at least one direct moral implication, namely that giving someone a disposition to reason worse is morally worse than it would be if epistemic rationality lacked authority.

Why might this follow from epistemic rationality’s having authority? The only answer I can come up with is that, if epistemic rationality indeed has authority, then there is something morally valuable about epistemic rationality itself (or the proper exercise thereof), such that our reasons to be epistemically rational are moral reasons.

Note that the kind of thought experiment at work here—a thought experiment involving two worlds, each in which I give someone a disposition to more regularly flout the norms of a certain standpoint, and where the worlds differ only in whether that standpoint has authority—can be run not just with epistemic rationality, but with any standpoint. And the result, I suggest, will be the same each time: Whatever standpoint we choose, we’ll find that it’s morally worse to give someone a disposition to more regularly flout its norms in the world where that standpoint has authority than in the world where that standpoint lacks authority. And this result, in turn, seems to suggest that there’s something morally weighty about authority itself, regardless of which standpoint is being imagined to have it. If that’s right, then this kind of thought experiment serves as a more general argument for moral pervasiveness. To capture the argument with a few rhetorical questions: Why would it necessarily be morally worse to make someone more prone to violating a standpoint’s norms when they have authority, unless those very norms, in having authority, were moral norms? If the reasons for following the standpoint were not moral reasons, why would morality necessarily care about whether people act in accordance with them?

Some might find this kind of argument odd. I’ve placed great emphasis on the fact that the authority of epistemic rationality (or of any normative standpoint) would have moral implications. But how philosophically significant is this, really? After all, doesn’t just about everything have moral implications? Consider, for example, chemistry. Chemistry implies that one morally ought not to bring
two large pieces of plutonium together very hard when there are people nearby. But surely chemistry is not itself a source of moral reasons; indeed, surely chemistry lacks any authority at all. Or, for another example: Interfering with someone’s red blood cells is immoral, but clearly we wouldn’t want to say that red blood cells are intrinsically morally valuable. With examples like these in mind, one might worry that the argument I’ve been advancing proves too much.

There is, however, a relevant difference between my argument and the above parody cases. Let’s take the chemistry example first. While there’s indeed a moral implication there, it comes less from chemistry itself than from a background moral view: a view to the effect that causing mass death is morally wrong. Without this moral view, the moral implication here would vanish. In the argument I’ve given, by contrast, the moral implications don’t rely on some background moral view. Rather, as we saw in the discussion of epistemic rationality, they stem directly from the non-moral standpoints’ (assumed) authority itself. It is this feature that makes the moral implications difficult to explain in any way other than supposing that these non-moral standpoints, to the extent that they give us reasons at all, give us moral reasons.

As for the other case, I agree that interfering with someone’s red blood cells is immoral. But what makes it immoral is not simply the interference with the red blood cells; rather, what makes it immoral is that it interferes with someone’s health. Health, not red blood cells, is the relevant level of description. And if the argument were reframed accordingly, such that it centered explicitly on health, there would be nothing implausible about its conclusion; it seems very plausible, after all, that health is morally valuable. (A standpoint centered on health would be one part or aspect of prudence—and, if what I’ve argued earlier is right, prudential reasons are a subset of moral reasons. Consequently, reasons of health are a subset of moral reasons.) When it comes to interfering with someone’s epistemic rationality, by contrast, there doesn’t seem to be any need to appeal to some further level of description in order for the argument to make sense. If epistemic rationality has authority, then giving
someone a disposition to reason worse is morally worse than giving him a disposition to reason better, and that’s that. I take this to suggest that if epistemic rationality has authority, then epistemic rationality, or the proper exercise thereof, is morally valuable.

N. What Explains Moral Pervasiveness?

Of course, I cannot consider all the infinite normative standpoints there are. I’ve tried, however, at least to consider the most prominent ones, especially those that are most often seen as having nothing to do with morality. If indeed such standpoints are together precisely as we’d expect them to be if moral pervasiveness were true—in that each of them either gives us moral reasons or gives us no reasons at all—that constitutes strong evidence for moral pervasiveness. And the evidence for moral pervasiveness only becomes stronger with the more general argument described in the previous subsection.

Importantly, the inductive strategy in this section—examining all the most salient normative standpoints to see which, if any, kind of normative authority they have in common—supports moral pervasiveness only. It does not support the corresponding pervasiveness of any other kind of authority. Consider, for example, an attempt to defend a claim of prudential pervasiveness: the claim that whenever we have a reason to Φ, it is, whatever other kind of reason it might be, a prudential reason. The trouble would be all too apparent. When we consider normative standpoints like epistemic rationality, morality, and so on, it doesn’t seem even initially plausible that their reasons are all prudential. After all, sometimes being epistemically rational (e.g., by believing in accordance with one’s evidence) will lead one to beliefs that are simply painful and debilitating, and thus unequivocally disfavored by prudence. (Think of cases in which one’s evidence suggests that one’s efforts are doomed to futility.) Similarly, some of our moral requirements involve helping others even when this provides

77 Here, some might have the following worry: Wouldn’t such epistemically rational but debilitating beliefs also, on my view, be unequivocally disfavored by morality, and thereby undermine the claim of moral pervasiveness, much as I hold them to undermine the claim of prudential pervasiveness? While I acknowledge that such beliefs would be disfavored by morality, I reject the claim that they would be unequivocally disfavored by morality. That is, if my
no benefit to ourselves. For example, imagine that you could save a stranger’s life at the cost of some pain to yourself, but that right at the moment of choosing, you would be forced to forget that the choice had ever happened. Surely you would be morally required to save the other’s life (or, at the very least, this would be a morally good thing to do), even though it would provide no benefit to you. All prudential goods are at least to some extent morally valuable, but not all moral goods are at least to some extent prudentially valuable.

Similarly, a claim of aesthetic pervasiveness would find no support from a review of the salient normative standpoints. It’s not as if whatever reasons are provided by, say, prudence, instrumental rationality, or epistemic rationality are aesthetic; in fact, it’s not even clear what it would mean for such reasons to be aesthetic. Is there necessarily beauty (or any other aesthetic property) in doing what’s in one’s own interest, doing what the evidence suggests is in one’s own interest, or believing in accordance with one’s evidence? Surely not. A similar pattern holds for other non-moral standpoints; no non-moral standpoint seems comprehensive enough to have an authority which pervades that of all other authoritative standpoints.

Morality is alone in being pervasive. In part because of this, moral pervasiveness is a striking phenomenon—a phenomenon that calls out for explanation. And it is here that we come to the first consideration in favor of totalism: Totalism would explain moral pervasiveness. That is, to put it in terms of mattering, the explanation of why everything that matters, matters morally, would be that moral mattering is the only kind of mattering there is.

earlier arguments are sound, and if epistemic rationality has authority, then there would be a moral reason in favor of the epistemically rational beliefs in such cases; this moral reason would simply be outweighed by other reasons, namely prudential reasons (which are themselves, of course, just another kind of moral reason, on my view). It seems a good deal more plausible that there would be a moral reason (even if outweighed) to believe in accordance with the evidence in such cases than that there would be any prudential reason whatsoever to so believe. In this way, such cases would still reflect moral pervasiveness while casting doubt on prudential pervasiveness.
Yet the point of this section is not simply that totalism explains moral pervasiveness. The point is that the explanation that totalism offers for moral pervasiveness—call this the \textit{T-explanation}—is especially \textit{good}. Indeed, it is seemingly the best explanation we have for moral pervasiveness. To show why this is so, I’ll discuss two theoretical desiderata on which the T-explanation fares better than competing explanations.

The first desideratum is parsimony. The T-explanation is remarkably parsimonious. It posits that there is only one kind of normative reason, namely moral reasons; \textit{a fortiori}, any standpoint that provides us with normative reasons will provide us with moral reasons. If we seek an alternative to the T-explanation, we must hold that what explains moral pervasiveness is not that moral authority is the only kind of normative authority. But this would force us to hold that moral authority is not in fact the only kind of normative authority. After all, if it were—that is, if totalism were true—that would immediately explain moral pervasiveness. Alternatives to the T-explanation, then, are forced to posit not just one, but multiple kinds of normative authority. In this way, alternatives to the T-explanation are less simple.

The T-explanation likewise fares better than alternatives with respect to a second theoretical desideratum, namely elegance. (Elegance is, of course, related to parsimony, but as I believe this section will make clear, the two desiderata are not identical.) As we saw above, the T-explanation could not be any more straightforward; when we consider the very meaning of totalism, it immediately makes sense that moral pervasiveness would follow. As we also saw above, alternatives to the T-explanation must posit both moral and non-moral kinds of authority. In doing so, alternatives to the T-explanation—if they are indeed to accommodate moral pervasiveness—must hold that all considerations with non-moral authority somehow “tie into” morality, such that they have both moral and non-moral authority. Yet what could explain why considerations with non-moral authority would all have moral authority as well?
This is a tall explanatory task; not surprisingly, attempts to meet it inevitably seem to result in explanations that are much more awkward than the T-explanation.

Consider, for example, Karl Schafer’s discussion of the “modesty” of the moral point of view. According to Schafer, morality is “modest” in that it itself recognizes that moral reasons are sometimes overridden by non-moral reasons. More precisely, morality recognizes two classes of reasons—on one hand, “the moral reasons in a strict sense,” and on the other hand, the “morally relevant reasons” (Schafer 2016: 247). The latter is a broader category in that it includes the former, but also includes (at least some) non-moral reasons. On this picture, morality takes into account not only moral reasons, but also non-moral reasons—and when the latter happen to be overriding, morality itself recognizes them as such. For example, perhaps my strictly moral reasons favor donating my money to charity, but my non-moral reasons more strongly favor spending it on some stylish clothes for myself, such that the latter action is what I ought simpliciter to do. On Schafer’s view, this state of affairs would not involve any conflict of obligations; it’s not as if I would be morally required to give the money to charity but rationally required to spend the money on myself. Rather, I would simply not be under any moral requirement to give the money to charity. In this way, “morality itself is capable of recognizing its own limitations…. [T]he moral point of view is sufficiently objective to appreciate the limited place of specifically moral reasons with [sic] the space of practical reasons more generally” (Schafer 2016: 246).

To be sure, Schafer himself doesn’t frame his discussion as an attempt to explain moral pervasiveness. Still, his discussion explores how it could be that (at least some kinds of) non-moral reasons are necessarily morally relevant, and in that way at least gestures toward an alternative to the T-explanation of moral pervasiveness. And Schafer is not the only one who has explored such ideas. Robert Audi (1998: 373) suggests that “morality demands that we serve certain non-moral values, for instance that we promote the general physical well-being of others.” Similarly, Seana Shiffrin (1999: 789-790) offers the following perspective:
[T]he moral point of view does not merely point out considerations of peculiarly moral salience and stop there. It takes up a more comprehensive, inclusive perspective that relates moral concerns to other sorts of concerns and values.... Morality may deem an action merely permissible, in spite of there being moral considerations in favor of it, because morality’s final pronouncements are not purely informed and shaped by moral considerations.78

All this strikes me as a strange view. If a reason is necessarily “morally relevant,” why would it not simply be a moral reason?79 If morality itself takes into account certain values, letting them shape its verdicts about one ought to do, how does this not ipso facto make them moral values? What we’re after is an alternative to the T-explanation of moral pervasiveness, but the alternative under consideration seems to raise at least as many questions as it answers.

Some might argue that there is not so big a puzzle here. There are, after all, plenty of cases in which one kind of value is relevant to another kind without thereby making any less firm the distinction between the two. For example, aesthetic value can be relevant to prudence without itself being prudential value. It may be more prudent for me to visit an art museum filled with items of more aesthetic value than an art museum filled with items of less aesthetic value, since I’ll get more enjoyment from the former. And if aesthetic value can so straightforwardly and unproblematically be relevant to prudential value, what’s so weird about thinking that non-moral values could be relevant to moral value?

The objection is right that aesthetic value can be relevant to prudence without itself being prudential value. The relevance, however, is merely contingent, not necessary. (Consider that I could very well be a philistine who is simply unmoved by aesthetic value; that the one art museum has items of more aesthetic value would then fail to make it any more prudent for me to choose that museum

78 For still other views that “mix” the moral and non-moral in this or other ways, see Portmore (2008), Wolf (1997: 314-315), and Zimmerman (1999).

79 Here I’m sympathetic to Shelly Kagan’s (1989: 66) way of thinking about the matter: “[S]ince we are concerned with what is required by morality, the relevant reasons—whether decisive or not—must be moral ones.”
over the other.) This makes for a disanalogy between the prudence-aesthetics connection, on one hand, and the imagined connection between moral and non-moral values, on the other, since the latter connection is supposed to be necessary.

However, the objector might press on: “Very well, but what about health? ‘Health value’ is relevant to prudence without being identical to prudential value, since the latter is a broader kind of value. And the connection is necessary, not contingent.” The objector is right about both claims, but mistaken to think that they help remove the puzzle. For there is an all too easy explanation of why “health value” would, while non-identical with prudential value, still necessarily be relevant thereto. The explanation is that health is partly constitutive of prudence. (Accordingly, while health value is non-identical with prudential value more broadly, it’s nevertheless a kind of prudential value.) And no analogous explanation is available to the view being criticized here; after all, were an alleged non-moral kind of reason to be partly constitutive of morality, then we could no longer call it non-moral. It would, instead, be as moral a reason as any.

If all this is right, then the view that morality necessarily takes certain non-moral reasons into account may well be incoherent. That’s a possibility I’m certainly open to, though I do not commit to it here. The point I’d like to emphasize here is simply this: Even if this view is not incoherent, it is at least awkward. In raising all these questions about how the non-moral is supposed to tie into the moral while remaining distinct therefrom, the view is a much less elegant explanation of moral pervasiveness than the T-explanation is.

I’ve argued that the T-explanation fares better than alternatives on at least two theoretical desiderata, namely parsimony and elegance. Some might concede these points but maintain that the T-explanation nevertheless fares much worse on another theoretical desideratum, namely intuitiveness. For the T-explanation, in relying on totalism, holds that all normative authority is moral authority, and surely this is a position deeply contrary to common sense. In response, I agree that totalism is
counterintuitive—when considered on its own. Once we’ve accepted moral pervasiveness, however, it’s much less clear that totalism is all that counterintuitive. Much of the intuitive resistance to totalism, it seems to me, stems from the sense that some kinds of normative reasons, such as epistemic reasons, are wholly separate from morality. Moral pervasiveness shows that that picture of the normative landscape is misguided, and that any normative reason is, whatever other kind it might be, a moral reason. When we start from that point, the step to totalism is much smaller than it might initially have seemed. So even when it comes to intuitiveness, the T-explanation seems to me to do fairly well.

Let’s recap. In this section I’ve argued that moral pervasiveness is a phenomenon that calls out for explanation. I’ve also argued that the T-explanation of moral pervasiveness fares better than alternative explanations on two theoretical desiderata, namely parsimony and elegance. I’ve also argued that the T-explanation does well even on the theoretical desideratum one might have expected would doom it, namely intuitiveness. As there don’t appear to be any other salient theoretical desiderata at work here, it seems that the T-explanation is, all things considered, a better explanation of moral pervasiveness than the alternatives. I take this to be a point in favor of totalism.

IV. The Intelligibility Argument from Moral Pervasiveness

The above-described inference to the best explanation is my first argument for totalism. Like this first argument, my second argument for totalism stems from moral pervasiveness. Rather than examining what might explain moral pervasiveness, however, the second argument takes a more direct approach: Moral pervasiveness is itself, I claim, a challenge to the intelligibility of non-moral kinds of authority. To see why this is so, note, first, that the traditional way of distinguishing moral from non-moral kinds of authority is to appeal to their content. For example, moral authority has to do with the reasons we have to help others; epistemic authority has to do with the reasons we have to hold well-supported beliefs; aesthetic authority has to do with the reasons we have to promote and admire beauty; and so on. In light of moral pervasiveness, however, this way of distinguishing moral from non-moral kinds of
authority won’t work. The reason is simple: For any kind of content we imagine to matter—even if it’s a kind of content traditionally considered non-moral—its very mattering at all will imbue it with moral value; thus, such content will fail to be distinctively non-moral after all. When moral authority pervades every kind of content that matters, appealing to content alone cannot distinguish moral from non-moral authority.

Consider, for example, a case in which we have a reason to promote a certain kind of beauty. Given moral pervasiveness, this reason will be a moral reason. But now imagine that we tried to say that this reason is also an aesthetic reason—in the sense that there is a separate, distinctively non-moral kind of authority, aesthetic authority, that bears on our situation. What would this mean? The sense of “aesthetic authority” at play here could not simply be “the kind of authority that gives us reasons to promote beauty,” since such reasons would themselves already be moral reasons. But then, what could it mean for there to be aesthetic authority as a distinctively non-moral kind of authority? What difference does it make to describe our reason to promote beauty as both a moral and an aesthetic reason, rather than simply a moral reason?

There does not seem to me to be any satisfying answer to these questions. One might point out, however, that there’s another way we might go about answering them, a way I haven’t yet considered. To distinguish moral from non-moral kinds of authority, we need not appeal to their content; instead, we can appeal to the practices associated with a given kind of authority. In chapter one, for example, I explained moral authority in terms of blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives. And who’s to say that non-moral kinds of authority couldn’t likewise be explained in terms of their own normative practices?

To distinguish a non-moral kind of authority in terms of a set of normative practices, three conditions must be met. The first is that the normative practices must be ways of thinking, feeling, or acting in response to the treatment of the relevant norms—that is, in response to whether and to what
extent people follow or fail to follow the relevant norms. (As we saw in chapter one, the moral practices I’ve been focusing on—blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives—fulfill this condition; they are all ways of thinking, feeling, or acting in response to the treatment of moral norms.⁸⁰) Fulfilling this condition is part of the very concept of a normative practice. The “practice” in “normative practice” refers to a way of thinking, feeling, or acting—and that alone doesn’t capture the normative element. To be a normative practice, a way of thinking, feeling, or acting must be about something normative: in particular, whether and to what extent people follow or fail to follow a certain kind of norm.

The second condition for distinguishing a non-moral kind of authority in terms of a set of normative practices is this: The practices must be ways of treating the relevant norms as if they matter.⁸¹ Once more, as we saw in chapter one, moral practices fulfill this condition. Blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives all seem to be ways of treating moral norms as if they matter.⁸² To be sure, we can imagine normative practices that are not ways of treating the relevant norms as if they matter. Consider, for example, something like this: “When

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⁸⁰ At first glance, this might seem like an odd thing to say. After all, two of these moral practices, namely feelings of bindingness and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives, are forward-looking. That is, they are about following moral norms in the future. Only blame, by contrast, is about evaluating whether and to what extent one has followed moral norms in the past. This might seem to suggest that only blame, not the other two moral practices, can be considered a way of thinking, feeling, or acting in response to the treatment of moral norms. Here, though, we shouldn’t be too literal in our reading of “in response to.” Something can be a moral practice even if the treatment of the relevant moral norms hasn’t yet happened; the moral practice could simply be a way of thinking, feeling, or acting in response to the prospective treatment of moral norms. This is what I take to be the case with feelings of bindingness and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives.

⁸¹ Or, more precisely: The practices must be ways of treating the relevant norms as if it matters whether we follow them. For ease of exposition, I’ll continue to use simply “ways of treating the relevant norms as if they matter.”

⁸² Of course, one might press me to say more. “You’ve given some examples,” one might say, “but you still haven’t said precisely what it means to treat a norm as if it matters.” Here I’m afraid I have no informative answer to give; the notion of treating a norm as if it matters seems resistant to being laid out in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. It also seems to me, however, that we nevertheless have a strong intuitive sense of what it is to treat a norm as if it matters, and that we can use this intuitive sense to judge particular cases. That we have a firm intuitive understanding of what it is to treat a norm as if it matters will be enough for my purposes.
people violate norm X, think about polar bears.” While this would, under my definition, count as a normative practice, the problem is that it would not suggest that the relevant kind of norm (whatever it may be) has any authority. To have authority is to matter, and for a normative practice to reflect the authority of the kind of norm it’s about, it must treat the relevant kind of norm as if it matters.

The third and final condition for distinguishing a non-moral kind of authority in terms of a set of normative practices is that the practices must be distinctively non-moral. In chapter one I argued that blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives are in fact distinctive to morality, and that this allows them to be worthy of the label “moral practices.” Were they not distinctive to morality, they would fail to distinguish moral authority as a kind of authority in its own right. In the same way, if a non-moral normative practice is going to be used to distinguish a non-moral kind of authority, then it had better be distinctively non-moral.

With these three conditions in mind, we’re now in a position to ask whether it’s possible to fulfill them. In short, the answer is negative: There doesn’t seem to be any kind of authority, or any set of normative practices, that meets all three. To see why not, let’s consider some of the most plausible candidates for a non-moral kind of authority. Take, for example, epistemic authority. If indeed there’s such a thing as epistemic authority, what it provides us with are reasons to believe in accordance with our evidence. Yet simply believing in accordance with our evidence is not a normative practice, since such believing need not be a response to the treatment of epistemic norms. If I perceive what appears to be a tree in front of me, and consequently believe that there is in fact a tree in front of me, then I’m believing in accordance with my evidence—but this is in no way a response to whether people are fulfilling epistemic norms (in the way that, say, blame is a response to whether people are fulfilling

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81 Or at least, the final condition to be considered here. I leave it open that there are additional conditions—that is, that the three conditions listed here are necessary but not sufficient conditions for distinguishing a non-moral kind of authority in terms of a set of normative practices. This is enough for my purposes because, as I’ll argue, no attempt to meet all three (necessary) conditions succeeds, and this alone suffices to show that no set of normative practices can distinguish a non-moral kind of authority.
moral norms). It seems, then, that if epistemic authority is indeed in the business of providing us only with reasons for belief, then epistemic authority fails to meet the first of the above conditions: It fails, that is, to correspond to a set of normative practices, where normative practices are defined as ways of thinking, feeling, or acting in response to the treatment of the relevant norms.

Some might object that this is all too quick. After all, some of what we do believe, and of what we have reason to believe, concerns the extent to which people fulfill epistemic norms. For example, when someone regularly violates epistemic norms, surely that gives us a reason to believe that he’s epistemically irrational. And to the extent that we so believe, our belief is a response to the other’s treatment of epistemic norms. Does such belief not suffice to be a normative practice, then? Here I’m willing to grant that it does. But even if it is in fact a normative practice—and, thus, even if epistemic authority meets the first of the above conditions—there’s still a failure to meet the second condition. That is, simply believing that someone is epistemically irrational does not in itself seem like a way of treating epistemic norms as if they matter. It seems entirely possible to believe, without any tension, both that a certain other is epistemically irrational and that this doesn’t matter. (Contrast this with the case of moral authority; it’s much more difficult to see, for example, how one could consistently (a) blame someone for violating a moral norm while (b) holding that the other’s violation of the moral norm doesn’t matter.) To reflect a kind of authority (rather than merely a kind of norm), a normative practice must be a way of treating the relevant kind of norm as if it matters, and simply believing that someone is epistemically irrational (or, for that matter, epistemically rational) does not meet this bar.

All this brings up a related point about criticism more broadly. One might think that a standpoint could have its authority reflected in the following way: Violations of its rules make criticism appropriate. However, as the above discussion suggests, mere criticism is not enough to reflect authority. Mere criticism, it seems, amounts simply to saying, “You’ve failed to follow norm X”—and that, of course, tells us nothing about whether norm X has any authority. For example, calling someone epistemically
irrational—which seems like a criticism if anything is—is simply another way of saying that he’s violating epistemic norms. And it’s perfectly possible to say that someone is violating epistemic norms, without thereby suggesting that epistemic norms have authority. (More generally, consider that no matter what action we perform, we are violating infinitely many norms, given the infinite variety of normative standpoints.) For a kind of criticism to reflect authority, it must not be mere criticism. Instead, it must be accompanied by additional elements—for example, resentment or indignation. But then, criticism accompanied by (or that manifests as) resentment or indignation would simply be blame, which is a moral practice; accordingly, the kind of authority it reflects would be moral authority. Remember the third of the above conditions: If a normative practice is to distinguish a non-moral kind of authority, the normative practice itself must be distinctively non-moral. But are there any such normative practices—or rather, any such normative practices that also meet the other two conditions? Finding one, I suggest, is more difficult than it might seem.

To get a better sense of the difficulty here, we might examine some further candidates for a non-moral kind of authority. For example, consider the following: “If someone fulfills athletic norms very well—say, by being great at a certain sport—we should admire her for it.” One might think that this kind of admiration could help distinguish athletic norms as having authority. After all, to admire someone for fulfilling a certain kind of norm very well (in this case, athletic norms) is clearly a way of thinking or feeling in response to the treatment of that kind of norm; accordingly, this kind of admiration meets the first of the above conditions. What’s more, admiring someone for fulfilling athletic norms very well seems like a way of treating athletic norms as if they matter. So admiration for athletic achievement fulfills not only the first, but also the second of the above conditions. The problem, however, is that it does not meet the third condition, that which states that the normative practices at work must be distinctively non-moral. For admiration occurs not only in non-moral contexts (e.g., admiring someone for his fame), but in many moral contexts as well. We admire people, for example, when they are
exceptionally kind, fair, or courageous. Such cases of moral admiration reveal that admiration itself is not distinctively non-moral—and, thus, that admiration, as a normative practice, cannot help distinguish a non-moral kind of authority.

The third condition here applies to more than just admiration. It also applies to the moral practices described in chapter one, namely blame, feelings of bindingness, and commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives. Indeed, the third condition applies to normative practices even beyond that. Consider praise as a normative practice—that is, praising someone for fulfilling a certain kind of norm. While at first one might be tempted to think this could help distinguish a non-moral kind of authority, it turns out that it can’t. After all, for however much we praise people for fulfilling certain non-moral norms (e.g., athletic norms), we also praise people for fulfilling moral norms. Accordingly, nothing about praise itself helps us distinguish a non-moral kind of authority. Likewise for punishment; while we might sometimes punish people for violating certain non-moral norms, we also punish people for violating moral norms (e.g., by ostracizing them). We see, then, that if there’s a normative practice that will help us distinguish a non-moral kind of authority, it will be neither praise nor punishment, nor admiration, nor blame, nor feelings of bindingness, nor commands and advice-giving intended as categorical imperatives. And, while there are surely other candidates one could propose, at this point it’s becoming difficult to escape the sense that any normative practice that is a way of treating a non-moral kind of norm as if it matters will also be a part of morality, and thus will not ultimately help distinguish a non-moral kind of authority. I, at least, have not been able to come up with any normative practice that gets past this problem—that is, any normative practice that meets both the second and the third of the above conditions. To the extent that there seems to be no such normative practice, an appeal to normative practices as an attempt to distinguish a non-moral kind of authority will not succeed.
Let us take stock. I argued near the beginning of this section that in light of moral pervasiveness, the traditional way of distinguishing moral from non-moral kinds of authority—namely an appeal to their distinctive content—will not work. I then considered an alternative proposal for distinguishing moral from non-moral kinds of authority, namely an appeal to their distinctive normative practices. I argued, however, that this way, too, ultimately fails. And, beyond these two ways, there does not seem to be any other potential way of distinguishing between kinds of authority. Or at least, there is none that I’m aware of. As long as no other potential way of distinguishing between kinds of authority seems forthcoming, we’ll remain unable to make sense of what a non-moral kind of authority could be. The most natural conclusion, I propose, is that there is ultimately no such thing as a non-moral kind of authority; all authority is moral authority.
CHAPTER 3: OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

I. Moral Overridingness

Now that we've seen my arguments for totalism, the time has come to respond to some lingering objections. First, let's consider some objections from the alleged non-overridingness of morality. To be sure, totalism is distinct from the view that morality is always overriding—the view, that is, that moral obligations are categorically more important than other kinds of obligations, such that in any conflict between a moral and a non-moral obligation, one ought (rationally, or all things considered, or simpliciter, etc.) to follow the moral obligation. The reason why totalism is distinct from this claim of moral overridingness is simple: If indeed, as totalism holds, all normative authority is moral authority, then there are no non-moral obligations for moral obligations to override in the first place. Still, totalism and moral overridingness are roughly in the same spirit, for both views give morality a privileged position in their account of normativity.

In light of this, it's not surprising that totalism has a stake in the debate over moral overridingness. Moral overridingness is a highly controversial thesis, a thesis that faces many objections. If even one of these objections is successful—that is, if even one of them shows that moral obligations are sometimes overridden by non-moral obligations—that will entail that morality is not the only normative standpoint with authority. Of course, if there are non-moral obligations at all—even if they are always overridden by moral obligations—that will likewise entail that totalism is false. Arguably one of the most classic ways of arguing that there are non-moral obligations at all, however, is to try to find cases in which they override moral obligations.
Since I cannot respond to all the objections to moral overridingness, I’ll focus on some that come from Matthew Kramer (2009: Ch. 4.4), as they seem to me to give a good sense of the spirit of resistance to moral overridingness more broadly. Kramer begins by posing the following case: Andrew has made a promise to meet his friend Mary for a picnic at noon. On the way there, however, Andrew discovers that he has a winning lottery ticket, and that if he turns it in by noon, he’ll receive a reward of $20 million. Unfortunately, doing so will require him to miss the picnic—and, as Mary will not be near a phone until after the scheduled picnic, it would also require standing Mary up. What should Andrew do? Kramer suggests that while Andrew continues to have a moral obligation to keep his promise to Mary, he has a conflicting prudential obligation (viz., to turn in the winning ticket and receive the money) that is much stronger; accordingly, what he ought overall to do is miss the scheduled picnic and turn in the lottery ticket (Kramer 2009: 144). The lesson: Sometimes non-moral obligations (in this case, a prudential obligation) override moral obligations. In this way, the case is meant to be a counterexample to moral overridingness.

By this point in the book, what my view would say in response to such a case is perhaps unsurprising. I hold that Kramer misdescribes the case; rather than a case of a moral obligation’s being overridden by a non-moral obligation, this is a case of a moral obligation’s being overridden by another moral obligation. More precisely, keeping promises matters morally—yet so, on my view, do Andrew’s own interests, interests which would presumably be greatly advanced by winning the lottery. Given how greatly Andrew’s interests would be advanced by winning the lottery, it’s morally more important for

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85 Other philosophers who argue against moral overridingness include Foot (2002) and Portmore (2008).

86 Strictly speaking, Kramer puts the point in terms of a conflict between a moral obligation and a prudential reason, rather than a prudential obligation, but this does not matter for present purposes.

87 Or at least, one moral obligation overrides what would have been another moral obligation, were it not overridden. Whether the case ultimately results in one moral obligation or two is a point on which I remain neutral.
him to turn in the winning ticket in time than it is for him to keep a minor promise.\textsuperscript{88} In other words, where Kramer goes wrong is to assume that prudential obligations are non-moral obligations; what we should instead say, if my arguments in the preceding chapters are on track, is that prudential obligations are themselves a species of moral obligation, and that sometimes they are strong enough to override other species of moral obligation (such as, in this case, a moral obligation to keep a minor promise to someone else).

All this is, again, perhaps an unsurprising response from my view—and, were Kramer to say nothing more about the case, there’d be nothing more for me to say about it, either. However, Kramer considers the above response and finds it unconvincing. To be sure, he concedes that in some circumstances, such as if Andrew “were indigent and very heavily in debt,” then he would be morally obligated to turn in the winning ticket; were he to fail to do so in such circumstances, “he would not be showing proper respect for himself” (Kramer 2009: 147). Yet in the original case, there’s no assumption that Andrew is poor; instead, we may assume that he lives a middle-class lifestyle. While “[h]e would benefit greatly from the receipt of twenty million dollars... his failure to procure the money will hardly reduce him to penury” (\textit{Ibid.}). Accordingly, were Andrew to go to the scheduled picnic rather than take the money, he would not be going against any moral duty of self-respect. In forsaking the money, he would still of course be going against a strong prudential duty, but not a moral one.

For my part, it’s difficult to see how Andrew’s being middle-class counts against his having a moral duty of self-respect to turn in the winning ticket. Even if one is already reasonably well-off, why

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{88}This might seem like an odd claim; after all, if Andrew doesn’t turn in the winning ticket on time, then presumably someone else will win the lottery. And isn’t that just as good an outcome, morally speaking? Two potential responses suggest themselves. The first is that if Andrew really is willing to forgo $20 million simply to keep a minor promise to a friend, that suggests that he doesn’t value his own interests to the extent that he should. And to the extent that that’s right, the moral issue wouldn’t simply be that he goes without the $20 million; rather, it would be that he does so in a way that suggests a shortfall of self-respect. Second, to the extent that morality allows (or perhaps even encourages) some degree of partiality, Andrew could have a stronger agent-centered moral reason to claim the money than to let someone else have it. For further discussion of the possibility of agent-centered moral reasons, see section III.
\end{quote}
think that that precludes one from having a moral duty to make oneself much *better-off* when one can easily do so? Why would the moral duty of self-respect not apply here? Do advancements to one’s own interests and well-being stop being morally important once one gets out of poverty?

Kramer does, however, offer a further argument for his view. The argument begins with the suggestion that whenever one breaks a moral obligation, one owes a remedial moral duty (e.g., to apologize and make amends to whomever one has wronged). Now imagine that, for the sake of argument, Andrew indeed has a moral obligation to turn in the winning ticket, but that he decides against it, opting to go to the scheduled picnic instead. We might now ask whether, having broken his stipulated moral obligation, Andrew owes a remedial moral duty to himself. Yet clearly, Kramer’s thought goes, Andrew owes no remedial moral duty to himself (e.g., a duty to feel regret for not claiming the jackpot). And since the absence of a remedial duty entails that no moral obligation was broken originally, it follows that Andrew was not in fact morally obligated to claim the jackpot in the first place (*Ibid.*).

As an initial point in response, it’s not obvious to me that Andrew has no duty to feel regret for not claiming the jackpot. Just as it remains plausible (as suggested above) that claiming the jackpot is a matter of self-respect, given the extent to which it would advance Andrew’s interests, it seems plausible that feeling regret for failing to do so is a matter of self-respect, too. In particular, it’s a way for Andrew to recognize that his own interests matter morally, and that on this occasion, he has failed to accord his own interests the importance they’re due. Perhaps it still seems odd that there’s no additional remedial moral obligation—for example, an obligation to make amends to himself. When one wrongs someone, is there not an obligation to make amends to that person? Yet the absence of an obligation for Andrew to make amends to himself is not surprising. On my view, the reason why Andrew fails to incur an obligation to make amends to himself is not that he was never under a moral obligation to claim the money in the first place, but that there’s nothing he can reasonably be expected to do to regain even an
approximation of the money he forwent. Any serious attempt to regain the money would simply be too burdensome, since it would almost certainly require devoting the rest of his life to making money. Given that the only way he can even come close to making amends to himself is unduly burdensome, he’s under no obligation to do so.

To develop the point further, we might imagine a variant of the above case. Suppose, as before, that Andrew decides to go to the picnic rather than turning in the winning ticket on time. But now imagine that a few days later, miraculously, he finds that he’s bought another winning lottery ticket, and that if he turns this new ticket in, he’ll win a different lottery for $20 million. Since now he can make amends to himself for forgoing the $20 million of the earlier lottery, and without having to do anything unreasonably burdensome, is it really that implausible to say that he has a moral duty to do so? (Of course, he might well have had a moral duty to turn in the new winning ticket anyway. Its being a remedial moral duty in addition, however, could make it an even stronger duty.)

Perhaps some will still be put off by the suggestion that there are remedial moral duties to oneself. Even if they’re right, though, there remains another way I can respond to Kramer’s argument. Specifically, it’s open to me to hold that moral obligations to oneself are special in that, although they are as genuine a moral obligation as any, breaking them does not result in remedial moral duties. If this seems ad hoc, note that moral duties to oneself already seem special in other ways. For instance, in contrast to broken moral obligations to others, we don’t think that someone who breaks a moral duty to herself is thereby obligated to apologize to herself. Similarly, could it not be that breaking a moral duty to oneself happens not to lead to any remedial obligations more broadly? The prospect is at least plausible enough that Kramer should not simply assume it away. However, he says nothing against it.

As noted before, there are other objections to moral overridingness, objections that I lack the space to discuss here. Still, I hope that this brief discussion has indicated some of the difficulties of finding a convincing counterexample to moral overridingness.
II. Ethics for Pranksters

The next objection comes from Andy Egan and Brian Weatherson (2004), who think that sometimes the fact that an action is immoral (or at least, slightly immoral) is a reason to do it, rather than a reason to refrain from doing it. If they’re right about this, then such a normative reason would obviously have to be non-moral; there would be no sense in saying that something’s being (slightly) immoral could be a moral reason to do it. Accordingly, Egan and Weatherson’s view entails that there is at least one non-moral kind of authority. As such, it is a view that is incompatible with moral totalism.

Egan and Weatherson support their view primarily through examples. Their key example centers on a pie-throwing prankster. In throwing pies in people’s faces, the prankster causes harm—not serious harm, of course, but still harm on some level. Accordingly, his action is morally wrong; “[c]ausing gratuitous harm for one’s own amusement,” after all, “is immoral” (Egan & Weatherson 2004: 46). Yet Egan and Weatherson hold that such an action’s minor immorality can itself be a reason to perform it.

The reason to perform such an action would be that it contributes to a “valuable moral diversity” (ibid.). On this view, it’s for the best, all things considered, if society contains some occasional immoral actions. To see how, just consider the benefits at play. While throwing a pie in someone’s face may harm that person, it’s likely to be a source of amusement to passersby. Moreover, seeing the pie-throwing is likely to inspire others to take precautions against falling victim to pie-throwing attacks themselves. Lastly, the pie-throwing could lead to enjoyable and enlightening discussions of whether such actions are morally permissible. “The upshot,” Egan and Weatherson conclude, “is that [the pie-thrower’s] pranks can make the world a better place, all things considered, despite being immoral. Indeed, in some ways they make the world a better place because they are immoral” (Ibid.).

The problem I see here is that the benefits Egan and Weatherson list ultimately seem like moral benefits. Consider, first, the prospect that other people will be inspired to take precautions against pie-throwing attacks. To the extent that they do, this seems morally valuable, for it reduces the risk of
suffering a harm. And anything that reduces the risk of suffering a harm (even a minor harm) is at least pro tanto morally valuable. Next, let’s turn to the philosophical discussions of the moral status of pie-throwing that Egan and Weatherson envision. I hold that such discussions would be morally valuable, as they improve our moral thinking (and perhaps, if they go particularly well, contribute to our moral knowledge)—and surely this is a morally valuable result. Lastly, even the amusement of passersby is not without moral value. After all, it’s pleasant to observe actions that one finds funny, and many or most would agree that pleasure is morally valuable.

Thus, rather than positing anything so outlandish as the thought that the pie throwing’s immorality is itself a reason to perform it, I propose a more natural view. That the pie throwing would cause a minor harm to someone, and would to that extent be morally problematic, is in fact a reason not to throw the pie. It’s simply that this reason is outweighed by other reasons—reasons that are every bit as moral as the one they outweigh. And when the balance of moral reasons indeed leans this way, the pie throwing, pace Egan and Weatherson, fails to be morally wrong.

Of course, the pie thrower might well be in no position to know that the above-described moral benefits of pie throwing will follow. Or, even if he does know, perhaps he simply doesn’t care; perhaps he’s in the whole enterprise only for his own amusement. But even if so, that doesn’t suggest that the pie throwing itself is immoral. Rather, it simply suggests that the pie thrower has, at least in this respect, a morally poor character.

III. Is Totalism Moralistic?

Upon hearing the claim that all normative authority is moral authority, some will suspect it to be unduly moralistic. Yet “moralistic” could mean different things. On one meaning, to be moralistic is to be self-righteous, to be disposed toward grandstanding about one’s morality, and so on. Whatever faults totalism might have, clearly it is not moralistic in this sense. While it is easy to see how a person could be self-righteous and fond of moral grandstanding, this is not the kind of vice that could be had by a
philosophical view. There is, however, another sense of “moralistic,” a sense that some might suspect does apply to totalism. To be moralistic in this latter sense is to embrace an overly demanding view of morality, a view of morality which allows people no room to spend time on their personal interests, hobbies, and the like, but instead requires them to devote all their energy to the betterment of the world at large. Totalism, with its insistence that only moral pursuits matter, might seem to fall into this trap. And to the extent that it does, one might think that that is a reason to reject it.

One argument alone these lines comes from Dale Dorsey (2016: Ch. 3). Dorsey helpfully clarifies that the problem lies not simply in viewing morality as demanding; indeed, Dorsey himself believes that morality is demanding. The problem, rather, lies in the conjunction of a demanding view of morality, on one hand, and, on the other, any view that holds morality to be categorically more important than other normative standpoints (e.g., the view that morality is always overriding, or, in my case, that only morality has authority). Without this latter element, the element of holding morality to be categorically more important than other normative standpoints, moral demandingness poses no problem; faced with what appear to be unreasonably high demands coming from morality, the agent can simply recall that morality is not the only normative standpoint that matters, and that sometimes it’s better overall (or at least permissible) to follow the verdicts of other standpoints (e.g., prudence) when they conflict with those of morality. That, ultimately, is the solution Dorsey (2016: 89) prefers: Embrace a demanding view of morality, but hold that other normative standpoints sometimes matter equally to or more than morality. (In fact, for Dorsey, it’s precisely because of morality’s demandingness that we have good reason to believe that morality is not the only game in town. More on this below.)

By definition, totalism holds that only morality has authority, so Dorsey’s above way of confronting the problem of demandingness is clearly off limits to the totalist. Fortunately, there are other ways of confronting the problem of demandingness. Rather than holding that other normative
standpoints sometimes matter equally to or more than morality, the totalist may simply reject the claim that morality is demanding. In fact, as I’ll now argue, the totalist is well positioned to do so.

The first key point to recall here is this: When totalism claims that morality is the only thing that matters, this should not be taken to mean that pursuits traditionally considered non-moral—pursuits like one’s personal projects and hobbies—don’t matter. Rather, it’s simply that insofar as such pursuits do matter, the way in which they matter is moral after all. Thus, it’s not as if totalism, with its sole focus on morality, leaves out other sources of value; rather than leaving them out, totalism simply incorporates them into morality. (Nor, I hope, does it seem that totalism incorporates them into morality by mere fiat; if my earlier arguments are on track, then there’s considerable, independent evidence that prudence, personal relationships, and so on in fact matter morally.) The upshot is that it’s as open to the totalist as anyone to hold that there are agent-centered permissions to favor one’s personal projects over maximizing the impersonal good. Because one’s personal projects matter morally, their moral value can be weighed against that of other moral pursuits, and totalism itself leaves it entirely open whether the output of such weighing is an agent-centered permission to favor the former. Nothing in totalism itself, then, suggests that we ought to abandon our personal projects and devote all our energy to helping the downtrodden.

Dorsey, for his part, argues that morality doesn’t include permissions to be partial to one’s personal projects. Before explaining Dorsey’s argument, however, I should note that his stated target is not totalism, but moral rationalism, which he defines as the view that “if x is morally required to Φ at t, x is normatively required to Φ at t” (2016: 14). Moral rationalism, in other words, holds that “immorality is always all things considered irrational or normatively impermissible” (Ibid.). It is this view that Dorsey ultimately seeks to disprove. Since, however, totalism straightforwardly entails moral rationalism,
Dorsey’s arguments against the latter are, in effect, arguments against the former. Let’s look more closely, then, at Dorsey’s argument. 89

Dorsey (2016: Ch. 3) argues against moral rationalism, and by extension totalism, on the following grounds: While it is intuitively plausible that morality is impartial, 90 it is intuitively highly implausible that we are normatively (or rationally, or all-things-considered, or simpliciter, etc.) required to always be impartial. Whereas morality tells us to consider everyone’s interests equally, sometimes we are normatively at least permitted, if not required, to weigh some people’s interests—particularly those of ourselves and our loved ones—more heavily than others’. Rather than being normatively required to give all our time and money to famine relief, we may permissibly set aside much of our time and money for pursuing our own projects, buying holiday gifts for friends and family, sending our children to especially good schools, and so on. The lesson Dorsey takes from this is that morality doesn’t have the final word; sometimes the verdicts of other normative standpoints, such as prudence and the standpoint of being a good friend or family member, override those of morality. Hence, moral rationalism (and, by extension, totalism) is false.

Of course, one classic response to this kind of argument is to reject the premise that morality is impartial, and to hold instead that morality permits weighing the interests of oneself and one’s loved ones more heavily than those of distant strangers. Dorsey, however, rejects this response on the ground that it assumes the truth of moral rationalism, whereas the truth of moral rationalism is what’s in question. That is, Dorsey’s thought is that one could find agent-centered moral permissions for partiality plausible only if one already believes that morality’s verdicts are normatively decisive; in this way, to

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89 While Dorsey offers two main arguments against moral rationalism in his (2016), in this section I’ll examine only one of them. I’ll examine his other main argument against moral rationalism in the next section.
90 Dorsey (2016: 72) formulates the impartiality of morality as follows: “(1) The interests of persons generate moral reasons of strength proportional to the extent that the persons whose interests they are, are morally important. (2) Other things being equal, all persons are of equivalent moral importance.”
respond to Dorsey’s argument by appealing to agent-centered moral permissions for partiality is to beg the question against the moral anti-rationalist.91 Here’s how Dorsey himself (2016: 90) puts the point:

Given the generally plausible thought that one occasionally has normative permission to flout impartial obligations, the moral rationalist faces an important challenge. The moral rationalist must reject [moral impartiality] despite its inherent plausibility.92 But, as we have so far seen, arguments against [moral impartiality], in favor of a range of morally justified partiality, rely on moral rationalism itself and hence cannot be used to reject [moral impartiality] by way of a defense of moral rationalism. The moral rationalist, given the plausibility of a general rational permission not to treat everyone impartially, faces an impossible argumentative burden, and hence for that reason moral rationalism should be rejected.

All this seems to me to misconstrue the dialectic. Dorsey’s goal in the relevant chapter, and in his book more broadly, is to argue against moral rationalism. The burden at present is on him to argue that moral rationalism is false, not on the moral rationalist to argue that moral rationalism is true. Yet Dorsey speaks as if he holds the latter to be the case. As we see above, he begins with the claim—a claim which, I acknowledge, is at least somewhat plausible—that the moral rationalist is committed to rejecting moral impartiality. But then he immediately shifts to the much more problematic claim that “arguments against [moral impartiality]... rely on moral rationalism itself and hence cannot be used to reject [moral impartiality] by way of a defense of moral rationalism.” By making the subject of the sentence “arguments against [moral impartiality],” Dorsey seems to be suggesting that the moral rationalist must argue against moral impartiality. However, the most Dorsey has shown here is that moral impartiality is intuitively plausible, and that the moral rationalist is committed to rejecting moral impartiality.

91 Dorsey’s arguments here—that is, his arguments that one could find agent-centered moral permissions for partiality plausible only if one already believes that morality’s verdicts are normatively decisive—are complex, and here I won’t attempt to give a full description of them. Instead, I’ll simply quote Dorsey’s (2016: 85) own helpful summary: “[W]hy, if we don’t have to conform to moral requirements, does it matter whether they are demanding, whether they do not allow us to favor those close to us? If it’s the case that, whenever moral demands become too demanding, we can simply ignore them, why put pressure on a first-order moral theory to allow partiality, especially given that [moral impartiality] is prima facie plausible?”

92 Here, of course, Dorsey is not suggesting that the moral rationalist must hold that morality is to no extent impartial. (For instance, it’s open to a moral rationalist to hold that one morally ought to be impartial in one’s charitable donations.) Rather, the thought is simply that the moral rationalist must hold that not all morality is impartial.
impartiality. And none of this entails that the moral rationalist must argue against moral impartiality; it’s open to the moral rationalist simply to acknowledge that her view commits her to rejecting moral impartiality, and that this might well be, at least to some extent, an intuitive cost. Except where the intuitive cost is so severe as to render a view obviously untenable—and even Dorsey himself does not take himself to have shown this with respect to moral rationalism—simply biting the bullet in this way can be a perfectly legitimate response to an argument. No position can escape having counterintuitive consequences of some sort, after all.

Further, it’s not even clear that rejecting moral impartiality is all that counterintuitive, in the end. As touched on above, and as Dorsey acknowledges, there are various proposals on how morality might incorporate agent-centered moral permissions for partiality, and none of these proposals seems absurd on its face. What Dorsey claims to be problematic about these proposals, as we also saw above, is not that they are absurd, but that they rely on moral rationalism, when the truth of moral rationalism is what’s in question. Let us grant Dorsey’s claim that these proposals rely on moral rationalism. Even if that’s right, the problem is that Dorsey is again misconstruing the dialectic. Yes, the truth of moral rationalism is what’s in question—and, were the moral rationalist herself putting forth a positive argument for moral rationalism, she would of course not be entitled to assume moral rationalism. But that’s not the present circumstance; the present circumstance is that Dorsey is arguing against moral rationalism, which means that the moral rationalist is wholly within her rights to assume moral rationalism as she responds. By analogy, suppose someone were arguing that God does not exist because a supremely good being would not allow so much evil to happen. And suppose that someone responded, “God allows evil to happen because, in His goodness, He must respect people’s free will to do as they choose, even if what they choose happens to be evil.” Now, whatever the merits, or lack thereof, of such a response, clearly one thing that’s not wrong with it is that it assumes God’s existence. Imagine that the first person were to reply to it with “But now you’re begging the question, since you’re
assuming that God exists, and whether God exists is what’s at issue”; this would evidently be to
misunderstand the dialectic of their exchange. It seems to me that Dorsey misunderstands the dialectic
in the same way when it comes to moral rationalism.

IV. Totalism and the Supererogatory

Dorsey’s above argument is not his only attempt to refute moral rationalism. His (2016) contains
another argument against moral rationalism, an argument whose central claim is that moral rationalism
leaves us unable to provide a satisfying account of the supererogatory. Dorsey’s argument (2016: Ch. 4)
is highly complex; indeed, it is more a series of arguments, some of which Dorsey uses ten premises in
formulating, and all of which rely on a good deal of background discussion, definitions, and thought
experiments. Here I won’t attempt to address Dorsey’s arguments in their full detail, but simply what
strikes me as the general argumentative thrust of the chapter.

The argument begins, naturally enough, with the claim that it’s intuitively plausible that some
actions are morally supererogatory, in that they seem somehow to go beyond the call of duty (Dorsey
2016: 109). Other things being equal, then, our metaethics should offer an account of just what it is for
an action to be supererogatory. Yet if we accept moral rationalism, Dorsey argues, we can provide no
satisfying account of the supererogatory. Dorsey considers multiple moral rationalism-compatible
accounts of the supererogatory, arguing that they all fail. One such account is a satisficing account,
according to which actions need not be morally optimal in order to be morally permissible; instead,
there’s some absolute (non-optimal) threshold that marks an action as “good enough”—as an arbitrary
example, Dorsey (2016: 113) uses “70 percent of morally optimal”—and actions are supererogatory to
the extent that they exceed this threshold.

The problem Dorsey sees with satisficing accounts is that they cannot account for the following
datum about supererogatory actions, a datum which Dorsey (2016: 110) calls But for Sacrifice: “A subset
(S) of supererogatory actions would have been morally required but for the fact that they require non-
trivial sacrifice on the part of the agent.” *But for Sacrifice* seems to be true of the classic examples of supererogatory actions. For instance, a soldier who jumps on a live grenade to save his comrades is surely doing something supererogatory. But now suppose that the soldier could save his comrades at no cost to himself; surely his doing so would no longer be supererogatory, but simply morally required. If, however, we adopt a satisficing approach to the supererogatory, we run into trouble. Supposing that the soldier’s jumping on the grenade is in fact supererogatory, such that it would have been morally permissible for him to run away and refrain from sacrificing his life, we would have to say that his running away meets the threshold (e.g., 70% of morally optimal) for moral permissibility. And if indeed his simply running away meets the threshold for moral permissibility, we can no longer say that his saving his comrades, were it to involve no sacrifice for him, would be morally required (Dorsey 2016: 113-114). While saving his comrades here is no doubt morally better, saying that it’s morally required would entail that doing anything less, such as simply running away, is morally impermissible (or, to put it a different way, falls short of the threshold for moral permissibility—a threshold that it *ex hypothesi* does not fall short of). 93

In view of the failure of satisficing, Dorsey holds that there is one option left for those who wish to account for the supererogatory in a way that’s compatible with moral rationalism. This remaining option he calls the Portmore/Raz view, since Douglas Portmore and Joseph Raz each develop their own version of it. Here I’ll simply describe Raz’s version of the view. According to Raz (1990: Ch. 3), any supererogatory action is supported by the balance of moral reasons, yet the necessary sacrifice gives the agent an “exclusionary permission” not to act on the balance of moral reasons. We might think of exclusionary permissions as second-order reasons—more precisely, as reasons that justify the agent in

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93 To be clear, Dorsey acknowledges that the above form of satisficing, which he calls simple satisficing, is not the only one. He also considers Dreier’s (2004) more sophisticated satisficing account. Here I won’t go into the details of Dreier’s account or Dorsey’s response, except to say that Dorsey (2016: 114-115) argues that Dreier’s account, like simple satisficing, cannot accommodate *But for Sacrifice.*
 refraining from acting on the balance of first-order moral reasons. To the extent that the agent
nevertheless acts on the balance of first-order moral reasons, her action is supererogatory.

In one way, Dorsey is more optimistic about the Portmore/Raz view than he is about satisficing.
At the very least, he holds that the Portmore/Raz view accommodates But for Sacrifice. The reason is
simple: If not for the sacrifice to the agent, there would be no exclusionary permission not to act on the
balance of first-order moral reasons—and, thus, the action supported by the balance of first-order moral
reasons would be morally required after all. At the same time, Dorsey holds that the Portmore/Raz view
faces a different problem, namely that it entails some highly implausible first-order moral verdicts. In
particular, Dorsey (2016: Ch. 4, sec. 5) argues that the Portmore/Raz view entails that one is morally
justified in beating up someone else in order to take his money and buy a new car with it. Dorsey’s
argument here is complex and resists a brief summary. In order to make the length of the discussion
more manageable, I propose that we simply grant him the point.

Once we grant the prima facie problems with moral rationalism-compatible accounts of the
supererogatory, the question becomes whether other accounts of the supererogatory do any better.
Dorsey argues that the answer is affirmative: By rejecting moral rationalism, we open up a much more
defensible account of the supererogatory than those discussed above. Here, in more detail, is Dorsey’s
own, anti-rationalist account of the supererogatory. For Dorsey (2016: 127), a supererogatory action is
an action that is morally good but not rationally required. As an illustration, Dorsey describes the case of
Rose, a retiree who provides food, lodging, and other care to a nearby family in need. Given the cost of
doing so, Rose is unable to use her pension on other things that she would find more enjoyable. While
her helping the family is no doubt morally good or even morally required, it is not rationally required of
her; in light of the sacrifice it incurs, Rose has a rational permission not to help them. But this permission
is strictly rational, not moral; Rose’s sacrifice has no bearing on the moral status of the action. It’s simply
that given the sacrifice, Rose would not be breaching any rational obligation if she were to flout
morality’s verdict and follow the verdict of another normative standpoint, particularly prudence, instead (Dorsey 2016: 126-127). As we see from this example, Dorsey’s account of the supererogatory is anti-rationalist because it holds that moral requirements do not entail rational requirements. An agent can be morally required to Φ, as we might imagine Rose is morally required to help the family in need, but it could be that the agent is rationally permitted not to Φ, particularly when Φ-ing is costly to the agent.

Dorsey’s account is interesting and worth taking seriously. However, it runs into its own set of problems. The first problem stems from Dorsey’s (2016: 127) claim that supererogatory actions are always rationally permissible. Contra Dorsey, one might think that some supererogatory actions are rationally impermissible—for instance, if I give you my last few tablets of aspirin so you can relieve a mild headache, even though I could otherwise use them to relieve my migraine.94

For another case of apparently supererogatory action that poses a problem for Dorsey’s account, imagine this: You’re getting coffee from the barista, and suddenly it occurs to you that you could say something especially encouraging to her, such as “You are a person of value.” Plausibly, uplifting another in this way is a morally good thing to do. Yet few would say that it’s morally required. While we’re of course morally required to treat the barista with basic respect, to refrain from being rude, and so on, surely (the thought goes) our moral requirements don’t include explicitly affirming her worth as a person. In short, offering a word of extra encouragement to the barista seems like a supererogatory action. Yet this is a verdict that Dorsey’s view has trouble accommodating.

How so? Consider, first, that Dorsey views moral rationality as maximizing: What one is morally obligated to do is simply what the balance of moral reasons most strongly supports. Indeed, Dorsey (2016: 127) suggests that maintaining the view of moral rationality as maximizing, in its intuitiveness and simplicity, is a key advantage of his account of the supererogatory. Yet in the present case, a view of moral rationality as maximizing would seem to suggest that one is morally obligated to give the barista

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94 This point, together with the example, comes from Douglas Portmore (2016: para. 14).
the extra encouragement. After all, giving the extra encouragement seems to be what the balance of moral reasons supports; there seems to be at least one moral reason in favor of it, namely that it would brighten the barista’s day, and no moral reasons against it. So Dorsey seems committed to saying that one is morally required to give the extra encouragement as one grabs one’s coffee. This, most will agree, is a counterintuitive consequence.

Nor does the trouble stop there. Consider this further intuitively plausible judgment about the above case: One is not rationally required to give the extra encouragement. Dorsey’s view, it turns out, cannot accommodate this verdict either. The reason for this can be captured in a question: Since, as seen above, Dorsey’s view implies that there’s a moral obligation to give the extra encouragement, what could stop this from likewise being a rational obligation? Dorsey’s view has no satisfying answer here. To be sure, in other cases his view can explain how a moral obligation could fail to be a rational obligation. For instance, in the case of the soldier who must decide whether to jump on the live grenade to save his comrades, Dorsey would say this: While there’s a moral obligation to jump on the grenade, the sheer prudential sacrifice gives the agent a rational permission not to. More broadly, for Dorsey it is the intrusion of other (i.e., non-moral) normative standpoints’ reasons that prevents a morally good or required action from being rationally required. In the case of the barista, however, there don’t seem to be any such reasons in play. Offering the extra encouragement certainly involves no prudential sacrifice, nor does it seem to go against any other salient non-moral standpoint. It’s unclear, then, what could stop it from being a rational obligation, on Dorsey’s view. If indeed, as seems to be the case, Dorsey is committed to saying that it’s a rational obligation to give the extra encouragement, that is a further counterintuitive consequence of his view. While Dorsey himself criticizes other accounts of the supererogatory for failing to accord with our moral intuitions, it appears that his own account likewise has its fair share of failures to accord with our moral (and more broadly normative) intuitions.
Of course, none of this is a knockdown argument against Dorsey’s account. Accounting for the supererogatory is a notoriously vexing problem in metaethics, and this brief section is by no means the place to settle the dispute for or against any particular side. But in a way, that is precisely the point I wish to make; it remains very much an open question which account of the supererogatory is the best. Even if Dorsey is right that moral rationalism-compatible accounts of the supererogatory run into problems, it’s far from clear whether an anti-rationalist account of the supererogatory can escape problems that are comparably serious. As it stands, the supererogatory does not seem to provide firm evidence either for or against moral rationalism.

An additional point is that, even if accounting for the supererogatory does pose a special problem for moral rationalism (and, by extension, for totalism), one solution would be simply to reject the existence of the supererogatory. Perhaps this will strike some as unduly radical, given that it’s intuitively plausible that some actions are supererogatory. But there are reasonable doubts about how much weight we should accord our intuitions here. At least some of the key intuitions in favor of the supererogatory are, after all, bound up with various biases, particularly the biases of self-interest and of our emotional attachments to our friends, family, and commitments. Note the framing of a typical appeal to the intuitiveness of the supererogatory: “Surely it’s morally permissible for us not to sacrifice our special projects and relationships, even when doing so would allow us to more greatly benefit the worst off.” Such an intuition is all too easy for us to be drawn to, privileged as we are. Yet now consider how things must appear from the other side. Imagining ourselves as much worse off, we might consider this question: “Is it morally permissible for people much better off than we to favor their own projects and relationships, rather than sacrificing them in order to let us, too, have a life worth living?” Would it be any surprise at all if the answer we found intuitively most plausible were simply “No”?

Another intuition that might at first seem to count in favor of the supererogatory is the intuition that people sometimes deserve special praise. For highly commendable actions, especially when they
involve self-sacrifice, it doesn’t seem to be enough simply to say, “You did your moral duty.” From here we’re naturally led to the thought that some actions must somehow go beyond one’s moral duty. Nothing about people’s deserving special praise, however, requires us to posit the supererogatory. Even if a certain self-sacrificing action simply fulfills (rather than going beyond) one’s moral obligation, the very fact of its being self-sacrificing would presumably reveal the strength of one’s commitment to acting morally—and such a commitment no doubt warrants special praise. We need not be stuck saying, “You did your moral duty, and that’s that”; instead, we can say, “You did your moral duty, and given the sacrifice it involved, that says a great deal about your character.” For that matter, perhaps the class of actions considered supererogatory simply is those actions that in this way deserve special praise.

We should be careful, then, about putting too much weight on our initial intuitions in favor of the supererogatory. Rejecting the supererogatory may well be a more viable route than it first seems. And even if not, there remains the earlier point that any account of the supererogatory seems to face serious difficulties, not just accounts that are compatible with moral rationalism. If Dorsey wishes to show that the supererogatory poses a special problem for moral rationalism, further argument is required.

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No doubt there are many more objections I could discuss. Like any radical view, totalism faces more objections than can be addressed in a single work. The case I’ve made for totalism, then, must remain incomplete. I have attempted, however, at least to respond to the objections that seem most salient. If in fact totalism withstands the most pressing concerns, that greatly bolsters the case for it. In light of the above responses to objections, together with the positive arguments from the earlier chapters, it seems to me that the case for totalism is strong. Our evidence suggests that all normative authority is of one kind, and that that kind is moral.
CONCLUSION

Suppose that the case I’ve advanced for totalism is sound—what then? In this final section, I’ll briefly consider some salient implications of totalism: one for normative ethics, another for metaethics.

At first, it might sound surprising to say that totalism could have implications for normative ethics, given that totalism is a metaethical claim. Upon closer inspection, however, totalism indeed seems to have at least one such implication. Consider that some normative ethical views set firm limits on the sphere of the morally valuable. For example, according to utilitarianism, all moral goodness is a matter of promoting happiness and minimizing suffering; all moral badness, a matter of promoting suffering and minimizing happiness. Kantian ethics, meanwhile, holds that morality is a matter of whether we act from maxims that could be willed to be universal law—or, equivalently (at least for Kant), whether our actions are compatible with respect for persons. But insofar as it’s plausible that things outside these spheres matter at all, views like these run into trouble—for, in light of totalism, the way in which such things matter would be moral.

For instance, suppose that the fact that one has an end gives one a reason to satisfy that end, independently of whether doing so will make her or anyone else happier. Utilitarianism would then hold that such a reason must be non-moral. Yet if totalism is true, that strategy is closed off, since such a reason would be a moral reason after all. Similarly, imagine that having evidence in favor of \( p \) gives one a reason to believe \( p \), even when our belief (or unbelief) in \( p \) seems unrelated to any practical interests we might have. Insofar as such a reason could not be understood in terms of universalizable maxims or respecting persons, Kantian ethics would be forced to hold that it is a non-moral reason. Under totalism, however, such a reason would be moral. More broadly, totalism suggests that our normative ethical theory should be flexible enough to accommodate the variety of kinds of content that seem to matter;
no longer do we have the option of saying, “Sure, those other things still matter, just non-morally.” Though exploring it in depth would take me too far afield here, a non-utilitarian consequentialism—a consequentialism which holds that things beyond our happiness and suffering, and our actions in relation thereto, matter morally—would seem to have greater flexibility here, and would in that way gain some plausibility.

A second important implication of totalism has to do with metaethics. One of the most classic debates within metaethics is the debate over moral realism. Are there such things as objective moral facts and properties, or are they simply an illusion? The perceived importance of this debate has traditionally been tempered, however, by the prospect that non-moral standpoints might have authority. Even if it turns out that moral realism is false (or, to put it a different way: that morality has no authority), the thought goes, we need not consign ourselves to a wholesale normative nihilism; there could, after all, be plenty of things that matter non-morally, such as prudence, and it is these non-moral values that we could turn to for normative guidance (Blackford 2016: 108; Joyce 2008: 57-58; Marks 2013: Chaps. 3-4). If totalism is true, however, this maneuver is unavailable, since an absence of moral mattering would entail an absence of any mattering whatsoever. The result of totalism here, then, is that the debate over moral realism becomes much more important; on moral realism rests not just all prospects of moral value, but all prospects of any normative authority at all.

Some might reject as confused this talk of the increased importance of moral realism. For suppose it were to turn out that moral realism is false, and that consequently, per totalism, there is no normative authority whatsoever. In that case, nothing would matter—but then, the very fact that nothing matters would likewise fail to matter (Kahane 2012: 43; Lenman 2009: 8; Murphy 1982: 17; Parfit 2011b: 367). So in what sense would anything important ever have been at stake? And even if moral realism turns out to be true, could we really say that it matters that it’s true, since the alternative state of affairs (viz., moral realism’s being false) would not have mattered in the slightest? How could it
matter that a certain state of affairs obtains if the alternative state of affairs would not have given anyone any reason for regret or despair? These are challenging questions, questions that deserve more attention than I can give here. For now, I’ll simply say that if totalism is true, then the debate over moral realism “matters” in at least one sense, namely that it has immediate and decisive implications for one of the central questions of metaethics: whether there’s such a thing as normative authority at all. Should there be no normative authority at all, then we’ll of course lack a reason to do anything, including answering the central questions of metaethics. I suspect, however, that even if that is the case, and even if we philosophers were to come to know it, that would do little to reduce our interest in metaethical questions and in philosophical questions more broadly. To continue to explore such questions, and perhaps even to arrive at an answer to some of them, would be one of the final consolations to be had in such a world.
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