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The Motivating Power of the A Priori Obvious

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The Snellings who live down the street from me are vile. Besides proudly advertising their paid membership in the Ku Klux Klan, the Family Research Council, and the National Rifle Association, they also regularly engage in open displays of retail animosity towards their neighbors and acquaintances. They enjoin neighborhood parents to visit violence upon their children, and they also make fun of disabled people whenever they have a chance to do so.

I despise the Snellings, and was outraged to learn that the gun store that they own had made them rich. Unfortunately, they also own the only grocery store within 20 miles of where I live and work. Since I don't have a car, and public transit around here is nonexistent, I cannot avoid patronizing their grocery store. This morning, while buying food at their store, Mr. Snelling himself was working the cash register, and so I had to interact with him to make my purchase. I gave him cash, and he bagged the groceries and made change for me. But he accidentally gave me \$50 more in change than he owed me. (He mistook the \$50 bill I gave him for a \$100 bill.) I didn't realize his error until after I had walked out of the store and walked down the block, and, to judge from his level of distractedness during our interaction, I was confident that he didn't realize his error either. Nonetheless, I walked back to the store and gave him his \$50 back, explaining that he had given me too much change.

Why did I do that? I could really have used the extra \$50. I have no desire to be a moral exemplar, or even to be an especially good person. On the contrary, I don't particularly mind my own selfishness, and am quite happy to remain the selfish person that I recognize myself to be. Finally, I did not return the \$50 in a way that was designed to give me any satisfaction in pointing out his error to Mr. Snelling.

So why did I return the \$50? I did it because *it was obvious to me that I had to do so*. (To do otherwise—tempting as it might be—would be taking advantage of someone else's carelessness in order to steal.) That it was obvious to me that I must return the \$50—that I have no choice but to do so—motivated me to return it. To say that this was obvious to me is not yet to be committed to any particular account of what this

obviousness amounts to, for instance, whether it involves my standing in some relation to a fact, or a state of affairs, or of my having a mental state with a particular content, or a qualitative state with a particular character, or my exercising a competence with a particular aim, or what have you. But, whatever precisely such obviousness consists in, *it is the obviousness of my having to return the money that motivates me to return it.*

I have just described a familiar fact of our moral lives. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue against two prominent interpretations of this fact—one by Michael Smith and another by Michael Huemer—and argue in favor of an alternative interpretation. On the interpretation that I defend, when the obviousness of some moral demand motivates me to comply with it, it does so not by virtue of my having any particular desires, nor by virtue of anything's appearing to me in any particular way, but rather by virtue of my ability to become aware of necessary truths by reasoning and reflection alone. To be motivated by the obvious is not to be moved by desires, nor to be moved by appearances, but rather simply to reflect and to reason. In the remainder of this chapter, I will spell out these claims.

1. The Motivating Power of the Obvious Does not Depend upon My Desires

Michael Smith has argued that the fact that I have just stated—viz., that the obviousness of my having to return the money motivates me to return it—can obtain only if, and only because, this obviousness includes a desire. For, on Smith's view, whatever fails to include a desire cannot explain why any agent intentionally does anything (1994: ch. 4).

Here is how Smith spells out his influential argument for that view:

- (a) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal.
 - (b) Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit.
 - (c) Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.
- (P1) R at t constitutes a motivating reason of agent A to \emptyset iff there is some \forall such that R at t consists of an appropriately related desire of A to \forall and a belief that were she to \emptyset she would \forall .¹

Smith's formulation raises a needless problem, for the conclusion, as stated, does not follow from the three premises. But we can reformulate Smith's argument in valid form as follows:

- (a) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, having a goal.
- (b) Having a goal is being in a state with which the world must fit.
- (c) Being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring.
- (d) Having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, desiring.

¹ This argument is lifted *verbatim* from Smith (1994: 116).

Should we accept this argument?

Suppose we join Smith in accepting premise (a), and in clarifying that premise as Smith does when he says “it has the status of a conceptual truth. For we understand what it is for someone to have a motivating reason in part precisely by thinking of her as having some goal” (Smith 1994: 116). And suppose we also join Smith in accepting premise (b): “the having of a goal is a state with which the world must fit, rather than vice versa” (Smith 1994: 116).² In short, the conjunction of (a) and (b) says that having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, being in a state that imposes a normative demand on the world to conform to the content of the state.

But, on this understanding of what it is to have a goal, why should we join Smith in accepting premise (c)? Why should we think, for instance, that having a belief cannot itself be the same as having a goal? For instance, if I believe that I must achieve such-and-such a goal, then doesn't my having that belief amount to my being in a state that imposes a normative demand on the world to conform to the content of the state?

According to Smith, no belief can amount to having a goal, because belief, by its nature, does not have the right sort of functional role (or “direction of fit”) to amount to having a goal: to believe is to be in a state that imposes a normative demand on itself to have a content that conforms to the world, and does not impose a normative demand on the world to conform to the content of the state. Thus, Smith says, beliefs are rationally pressured out of existence in response to evidence that their content is false, whereas goals are not.

For instance: my belief that I returned the money to Mr. Snelling can be rationally pressured out of existence by evidence that I did not do so: such evidence would provide a reason to stop having the belief. But my goal, or desire, that I return the money to Mr. Snelling cannot be rationally pressured out of existence by evidence that I did not do so: such evidence would not provide a reason to stop having the goal. So even if an agent simultaneously believes that *p* is true and wants it to be the case that *p* is true, the agent's belief cannot be the same as her goal, since their rational sensitivity to evidence differs.³

Now, what this argument shows is not (c) that being in a state with which the world must fit is desiring, but rather (e) that being in a state with which the world must fit is not being in a state that is rationally sensitive to evidence concerning the truth-value of its content. I agree with Smith that (e) is true, and for the reasons that he provides. But

² Frost 2014 points out, quite plausibly, that normative demands can be addressed only to an agent, and not to the world, and so the very idea of a “practical” direction of fit must be understood as a normative demand that the agent imposes—by dint of her intentions, desires, or goals—upon her own performance. Smith's argument can be adjusted to accommodate this point if premise (b) is changed to “having a goal is being in a state that imposes a normative demand upon one's own performance,” and premise (c) is changed to “being in a state that imposes a normative demand upon one's own performance is desiring.” In the text, I stick to Smith's original formulation more closely if only in order to reflect Smith's own thinking about the matter a little more accurately.

³ When Little 1997 says that “there is no one propositional content of a mental state with a double direction of fit,” she is making a point that Smith would concede, and from which Smith concludes that beliefs and desires must have different contents. I believe that Smith need not concede this point to Little.

I want to stress that (e) does not imply (c), and that the conjunction of (a), (b), and (e) does not imply (d) that having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, desiring. What the conjunction of (a), (b), and (e) implies is rather (f) that having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, being in some state that is not rationally sensitive to evidence concerning the truth-value of its content. What sorts of non-desiderative states could fail to be rationally sensitive to evidence concerning the truth-value of their content, and yet still be involved in having a goal, is a topic we will come to in a moment.

Since Smith acknowledges the kinds of data from which we began—such plain facts as that I am motivated to return the money to Mr. Snelling because it is obvious to me that I must—how can he explain those facts in a way that is consistent with his Humean account of motivation, *viz.*, (d)? Here's how Smith tries to explain away such data: On Smith's analysis, normative beliefs—such as the belief that I must achieve goal G—are beliefs about what the believer has reason to desire. To believe that I *must* achieve goal G is to believe I have *compelling* reason to desire to achieve G. If I am rational, then I will not both believe that I have compelling reason to desire to achieve G but also not desire to achieve G. On the contrary, if I am rational, and I believe that I have compelling reason to desire to achieve G, then I will also desire to achieve G. And that desire, on Smith's view, is what motivates me to act so as to achieve G, if I do. Thus, it is not the normative belief itself that motivates my action, but rather the desire that I will also have if I am rational, *viz.*, if I desire what, by my own lights, I have compelling reason to desire.

Now, let us apply this to the case of my returning the money to Mr. Snelling because it is obvious to me that I must do so. Smith could explain this case as follows: its being obvious to me that I must return the money is simply my confidently believing that I must return the money. Rationality imposes a constraint on which combinations of beliefs and desires an agent can have at once. If a rational agent believes that she must achieve G, then she will desire to achieve G. Since I believe that I must return the money to Mr. Snelling, I will, if I am rational, desire to return the money to Mr. Snelling. Thus, it may seem to the casual observer that I return the money to Mr. Snelling because it is obvious to me that I must do so. But what is really going on is this: I am rational, and so my confidently held belief that I must return the money to Mr. Snelling is accompanied by my desire to do so.

Is this a good explanation of the data? Smith's explanation, recall, goes as follows: if a fully rational agent judges that she ought to F, then she will also desire to F, since rationality rules out the combination of believing that one ought to F while not wanting to F. But the phenomenon that Smith took himself to be trying to explain away was not that *fully rational* agents are sometimes motivated to act by their own judgments, but rather that *actual* agents are sometimes motivated to act by their own judgments. The actual agents who are seemingly so motivated—actual agents like myself in the Snelling case above—are typically less than fully rational.

Are actual agents close enough to being fully rational that we can assume their rationality in explaining their behavior, just as we might assume away friction in

explaining the orbits of the planets? Perhaps they are, and in general we can. But the problem with Smith's explanation is not that his assumption of rationality is only approximately true. It is rather that departures from full rationality vitiate any attempt (such as Smith's) to explain a particular piece of behavior by appeal to a wide scope constraint of rationality. Let me explain.

So long as agents are less than fully rational, there may be cases in which their beliefs are themselves less than fully rational. So consider an actual agent who is less than fully rational, who judges that she ought to F, and whose judgment is itself less than fully rational. Is it rational for such an agent to desire to F? Maybe, or maybe not. If her judgment that she ought to F is itself less than fully rational, then perhaps her most rational option is to suspend that judgment, as opposed to desiring to F.⁴

The rational constraint to which Smith appeals in explaining what he takes to be the apparent motivating power of normative judgment is a wide-scope constraint. But wide-scope constraints do not dictate what to do: an agent who violates a wide-scope constraint might come into compliance with it in more than one way. Thus, from the fact that there is a wide-scope constraint of rationality according to which one ought not simultaneously believe that one ought to G while also failing to desire to G, it does not follow that someone who believes that she ought to G is thereby under a rational imperative to desire to G. But if an agent steadfastly believes that she ought to G, does it not follow that the only way of satisfying the wide-scope requirement of rationality is to desire to G? No: all that follows is that the only way to satisfy the wide-scope requirement *consistent with the agent's steadfast belief* is to desire to G. But when an agent treats one of her steadfast beliefs as simply a fixed feature of her life, not up for negotiation, she ceases to treat it as a source of commitments for which she is criticizable, and so engages another form of irrationality (what is sometimes called "bad faith").⁵ Wide-scope constraints cannot generate narrow-scope constraints, even given a certain set of beliefs or desires. But an explanation of what an agent does by appeal to the agent's compliance with some requirement of rationality can succeed only when the requirement in question is narrow scope.⁶

Where does this leave us? Smith was trying to explain away the appearance that normative judgments motivate action, and he did so by claiming that, while normative judgments themselves do not motivate, they do generate rational pressure on the agent to have the desire that would motivate. We saw that his explanatory attempt fails, since the rational requirement to which he appeals is wide scope: since a less than fully rational agent can try to comply with a wide-scope rational requirement in different ways, appeal to that requirement cannot explain why such an agent tries to comply with it in one way rather than another. And, I will add, it is not clear how any other

⁴ Arpaly (2002) has made just this point by considering the case of Huck Finn's decision not to betray his fugitive friend Jim.

⁵ Broome 2013 on the enkratic principle is a prominent example of this sort of bad faith.

⁶ Copp 1997 also criticizes this particular explanation of Smith's, though his criticism is quite different from the present one.

attempt on behalf of the Humean theory of motivation could succeed: the obviousness of normative demands seem quite plausibly to be a source of motivation that is distinct from any desire, and it is not clear how this appearance could be explained away. Nevertheless, we also saw that Smith himself gave a good argument for the conclusion that having a motivating reason is, *inter alia*, being in a state that (unlike belief or judgment) is not counterfactually sensitive to evidence concerning the truth-value of its content.⁷ So having a motivating reason must involve something other than belief, or judgment, or any other evidence-sensitive state. But it also must be the kind of thing that is plausibly involved in its being obvious to an agent what she must do, or ought to do. What could this kind of non-doxastic, non-desiderative state be?

To introduce my proposal (which is a version of the view articulated by McDowell 1979), let us consider another kind of mental state that is neither desiderative nor rationally sensitive to evidence concerning the truth-value of its content. Consider the spots that seem to be moving in my visual field when I undergo *muscae volantes*. The experience that I undergo has a particular qualitative character, and it can also serve as the evidential basis for me to make various judgments. Before I understood the phenomenon of *muscae volantes*, I used to judge, quite reasonably, that there were tiny specks of dust floating in the air just in front of my eyes. Once I learned how the phenomenon worked, it became more reasonable for me to judge that I am tired, or have been looking at a computer screen for too long. So the experience that I am describing has both qualitative and evidential properties. It is disputable whether or not the experience has representational content, and, if it does, whether it represents the motion of small but visible objects in our surroundings. But, if it does, such content is presumably known to be false by those of us who are having the experience, so long as we understand the causes of that experience. Furthermore, there is nothing irrational about continuing to have such an experience while knowing its causes. The experience is not rationally pressured out of existence in response to evidence that any such representational content is false; it is not rationally sensitive to evidence in the way that beliefs and judgments are. But the experience is also not any kind of desire. It is a non-desiderative, non-doxastic state.

The sort of experience that I am describing need not involve any disposition or tendency to believe anything in particular; the very same experience may be enjoyed by someone who bears no such disposition or tendency. Thus, the experience that I am describing need not be, as Tenenbaum (2006) suggests, the *prima facie* version of an “all-out” attitude.

Could there be an event of this sort, our undergoing of which was involved in, and at least partly constitutive of, our having a goal? Consider what happens when I realize I have been given too much money, and that I must return the excess. I undergo a particular mental event. This mental event has a particular qualitative character,

⁷ I say that Smith's argument for this claim was good, but of course that is disputed. See, for instance, the critical discussion in Scanlon (1998: ch. 1). I am persuaded by Smith 2011 that Scanlon's objections all fail.

a character most succinctly expressed by language that cannot be printed in a scholarly work. The event can also serve as the evidential basis for me to make various judgments, for example, that I need to go back to the store, that I will probably be late for my next appointment, etc. Does the event have a representational content? As I pointed out at the beginning of our discussion, that is disputable. But even if it does have such content, the event itself, or the mental state into which it puts me, need not be under any rational pressure to disappear when I am faced with powerful evidence that its content is false. I might, for instance, discover an apparently compelling argument that all private property is theft. Even so, I could still, without irrationality, *find it obvious* that I must return the money to Mr. Snelling. There would, of course, be some cognitive dissonance between this sense of obviousness, on the one hand, and the various judgments that I make, on the other, but, as the *muscae volantes* case above should show, we are no strangers to such dissonance, nor need our suffering such dissonance be irrational (and that is true even if it is a necessary condition of our suffering such dissonance that our rational powers are less than ideal).

To sum up: it is not clear how the Humean theory of motivation can provide an adequate explanation of the data from which we began: the data concerning the motivating power of the obvious. But I concede to Smith that beliefs and judgments cannot motivate action. On the non-Humean proposal about motivation that I offer here, it is the obviousness of certain normative facts—and not an agent's beliefs about those facts—that can motivate action. Of course, everything I have said so far is consistent with the claim that, necessarily, whenever the obviousness of a moral demand motivates me to act, I also believe that the moral demand in question is genuine, and I desire to fulfill that demand. But the question at issue between Smith and me is whether such beliefs and desires are the source of my motivation, or are rather merely necessary features of my being motivated by some other source. Smith argues for the former view, and I have attempted to undermine his argument in this section.

So far, I have argued against the desire-based interpretation of the fact that I am motivated to return the money by the obvious fact that I must do so. But I have not yet said much about how such obviousness—whatever precisely it consists in—can motivate me. Indeed, it may seem that the view that I have defended here must be a form of what Huemer (2005) calls “ethical intuitionism.” In Section 2, I will explain why this is not the case.

2. The Motivating Power of the Obvious Does not Depend upon Appearances

Huemer (2005) defends a view that he calls “ethical intuitionism,” according to which there are irreducibly moral truths, and we can become aware of these truths by virtue of having, and reasoning on the basis of, certain kinds of non-sensory appearances.

Here are some of his examples of truths that we can know to obtain by virtue of such non-sensory appearances:

Enjoyment is better than suffering.

If *A* is better than *B* and *B* is better than *C*, then *A* is better than *C*.

It is unjust to punish a person for a crime he did not commit.

Courage, benevolence, and honesty are virtues.

If a person has a right to do something, then no person has a right to forcibly prevent him from doing that thing.

Prior to entertaining arguments for or against them, each of these propositions seems true. In each case, the appearance is intellectual; you do not perceive that these things are the case with your eyes, ears, etc. And they are evaluative. So the relevant mental states are ethical intuitions (Huemer 2005: 100).

On Huemer's view, the fact that a proposition seems true to you is itself some reason for believing that proposition to be true. In fact, if you have no reason to doubt the veracity of these appearances, then the fact that a proposition seems true to you can give you justification for believing that proposition, whether or not you do believe it. If you do believe the proposition on the grounds that it appears true to you, then your believing it can itself enjoy doxastic justification. And if your doxastically justified belief is itself true and undefeated, then it can amount to knowledge. Thus, on Huemer's view, an agent can come to know the truth of some moral proposition simply by virtue of believing that it is true for the reason that it appears true to her. So long as this belief is true and subject to no defeaters, the agent can come to gain moral knowledge by means of this very simple method. And if the proposition that the agent thereby knows to be true is a proposition to the effect that she must perform some action, the agent may be motivated to perform that action simply by virtue of knowing that the proposition is true. Thus, Huemer can explain the fact that I am motivated to return the money to Snelling because it is obvious that I must do so: this obviousness consists in its appearing to me that I must do so, and my reasoning on the basis of this appearance to the conclusion that I must indeed return the money, and thus doing so.

As I argued in Section 1, this picture is not subject to Smith's objection. But I believe it is subject to another objection, which we can see if we consider what it is for an appearance to be *the reason for which* we draw some conclusion, either theoretical or practical. What Smith calls "motivating reasons" are simply *reasons for which* in the practical domain, that is, reasons for which an agent performs a particular intentional action. The objection that I develop in this section is not directed against Huemer's view that appearances serve as *normative* reasons for drawing particular conclusions (theoretical or practical), but rather against his view that they serve as *motivating* reasons for performance of the relevant intentional actions.

For *R* to be a *reason for which* an agent *A* performs some action *X*, it is necessary that *R* is a *reason why* *A* *X*'s: all motivating reasons are explanatory reasons. But for *R* to be a

reason for which an agent A performs some action X, it is not necessary that R is a good reason for A to X: not all motivating reasons are normative reasons. Nonetheless, if R is a reason for which A X's, and R is not a good reason for A to X, then A is subject to criticism for X'ing for the reason that R. But A could be criticizable under such conditions only if A is *committed* to R's being a good reason for A to X. If A is not so committed, then even if we wish to criticize the transition from R to X'ing, there is nothing about A's making this transition that renders A herself criticizable. This is not to imply that A's commitment is conscious, or otherwise clear to A: not all of the commitments for which we are criticizable are conscious or clear to us. But we are criticizable only for our commitments.

I conclude that, for R to be a reason for which an agent A performs some action X, it is not necessary that R be a good reason for A to X, but it is necessary that A is (consciously or not) committed to R's being a good reason for A to X.

Such commitments are sometimes correct and sometimes not: the commitment to R's being a good reason for A to X is correct if and only if R really is a good reason for A to X. Otherwise, it is incorrect.

Such commitments are also sometimes justified and sometimes not: the commitment to R's being a good reason for A to X is justified if and only if you are justified in believing that R is a good reason for A to X. Although I do not believe all of the propositions to which I am committed, I am committed to all of the propositions that I believe. And I am justified in being so committed so long as I am justified in believing.

Finally, such commitments are sometimes correct in a way that manifests their justifiedness: what makes the commitment justified also explains why the commitment is correct. In such cases, we may say that such commitments are knowledgeable.⁸

What difference does it make whether the sorts of commitments that we are discussing are correct, justified, or knowledgeable? To answer this question, let us consider an example. I have a good reason to return the money to Mr. Snelling, *viz.*, it belongs to him. But my action is justified only if I perform it *for* this reason, and so only if I perform it in a way that indicates my commitment to its being a good reason. That is a necessary condition of my action's being justified. But is it sufficient? Clearly not: suppose I return the money to Snelling because I reason as follows: the money belongs to Snelling, therefore it does not belong to me, and since anything that does not belong to me must be given to Snelling, this money must therefore be given to Snelling. In such a case, I do the right action (returning the money to Snelling) for the right reason (*viz.*, that it belongs to Snelling), but there is something wrong about the way in which I reason from that right reason to that right action. And this defect in the explanatory relation between my action and the reason for which I perform it vitiates the justificatory status of my action. While I perform the action that I should perform, and I perform it for the

⁸ Although I use the terms "correct," "justified," and "knowledgeable," instead of "accurate," "adroit," and "apt," I mean here to be describing the AAA structure of normativity articulated by Sosa 2007, especially lecture 4. I develop a view of the basing relation that includes this AAA normative structure in Neta forthcoming.

reason that I should perform it, there is something wrong with the way in which I act on that reason. To avoid this kind of defect in my action, I must not only do the right thing for the right reason, but I must also do it in the right way for the right reason.

Thus, if it is so much as possible for my returning the money to Snelling to avoid the defect just described, I must have a justified commitment to my motivating reason's being a good normative reason for me to return the money. Now, Huemer says that my motivating reason is something of the following sort: it appears to me that I must return the money. But how am I justified in thinking that such an appearance constitutes a good normative reason for me to return the money? What makes it the case that I am justified? Huemer claims that the answer to this question is of the following fully general form: I am a priori justified in believing that *p*, if it appears to me that *p* and I have no reason for doubting appearances.

This view, which Huemer calls “phenomenal conservatism,” is subject to an obvious objection that its proponents have recognized but have not yet rebutted. The objection is stated succinctly by Huemer as follows: “We need reasons for believing our ethical intuitions, or the faculty of intuition in general, to be reliable. Otherwise, intuitions cannot justify our moral beliefs” (Huemer 2005: 107). In other words, if we do not have any reason to trust our ethical intuitions, or to treat them as reliable, then our merely having an intuition that *p* cannot be a good reason for us to believe that *p*. We are not justified in believing what intuition tells us unless we have some reason to believe it tells us the truth.

Here is how Huemer replies to this objection:

What happens if we apply the principle generally: “We need positive reasons for trusting appearances”? Then we need positive reasons for trusting sense perception, memory, introspection, even reason itself. The result is global skepticism. Nothing can be accepted until we first give a positive reason for trusting that kind of belief. But we cannot give such a reason without relying on sense perception, memory, introspection, reason—or in general, on *some* source. Hence, we shall never be able to trust anything. Of course, this means we also could not trust the reasoning of this paragraph. (Huemer 2005: 107)

Let us grant Huemer that if the principle applies to ethical intuitions, then it applies generally, to sense perception, memory, introspection, and even reason itself. How does this imply global skepticism? Huemer thinks it implies global skepticism because it implies that “nothing can be accepted until we first give a positive reason for trusting that kind of belief.” But there is a subtle difference between what the principle in question actually implies, and what Huemer says it implies. What it actually implies is that nothing can be accepted *unless we can give* a positive reason for trusting that kind of belief. But what Huemer says it implies is that nothing can be accepted *until we first give* a positive reason for trusting that kind of belief. And the latter does not follow from the former. Huemer does not rule out the possibility that, in order for me to be justified in trusting the deliverances of some source, I must have the ability to give a reason for trusting the source, but that I can have this latter ability only if I am justified

in trusting the deliverances of that very source. In other words, he does not rule out the possibility that there is mutual dependence between my justification for accepting the deliverances of a source, on the one hand, and my justification for thinking that source to be generally reliable or trustworthy, on the other.

To say that each of these things depends on the other is not to be committed to any form of coherentism. As I have argued elsewhere, there is a foundationalist version of this view, according to which all empirical justification derives from a foundation of our total empirical evidence, but it is a holistic constraint on our total empirical evidence set that every piece of information in it is delivered by a source the reliability of which is itself supported by that same total body of empirical evidence (Neta 2012). So, even if Huemer rejects coherentism, he has still done nothing to show that the bruited objection to phenomenal conservatism leads to skepticism, global or otherwise. A foundationalist can consistently reject phenomenal conservatism and also reject skepticism.

In order for Huemer to rebut the present objection to phenomenal conservatism, he would need to give some positive reason to think that appearances are reliable—or, to focus on the present issue alone, that ethical intuitions are generally true. But, apart from unsuccessfully raising the specter of skepticism, he does not do this. I conclude that he has given us no reason to think that our ethical intuitions are generally true.

Independently of what reasons Huemer has given, might we anyway have some positive reason for thinking that our ethical intuitions are true?⁹ Quite clearly, we have positive reason for thinking that at least many of our perceptual experiences are veridical, viz., we do not usually end up bumping into trees when we watch where we are going. And we have pretty reliable ways of distinguishing perceptual experiences that are trustworthy from those that are not. Similarly, we have positive reason for thinking that at least many of our memory experiences are veridical, viz., our memories tend to be corroborated by external evidence and the memories of other people. And, once again, we have pretty reliable ways of distinguishing memories that are trustworthy from those that are not. Do we also have such positive reason for thinking that our ethical intuitions are veridical? It is not clear whether appeals to the successful achievement of our goals, or to communal agreement, are relevant when it comes to the reliability of ethical intuitions. But, even if these things had some relevance, it is not clear how we can use these tests, or other empirical tests, to distinguish those ethical intuitions that are veridical from those that are not. If our moral knowledge is to be derived from ethical intuitions, we had better have some way of distinguishing the ethical intuitions that are probably veridical from those that are not. Does reflective equilibrium offer us a way of doing this? I don't know the answer to this question, but the question is irrelevant, since I don't appeal to reflective equilibrium when I decide to return the money to Snelling. (Perhaps, if I need to seek help in resisting my powerful temptation to keep the money, I might ask myself "what if everyone who detested me

⁹ See Setiya 2013—in particular its discussion of Street 2006—for additional discussion of this issue.

felt free to steal from me whenever I made it easy for them to do so?” But asking such a question is a far cry from achieving reflective equilibrium.)

Huemer gives us a story about moral motivation that avoids Smith’s objection, but suggests that it is a lucky accident if my moral reasons for acting are any good at all. In Section 3, I develop a view that avoids this problem, a view according to which ethical facts can motivate not merely through being apparent but through being manifest.

3. The Motivating Power of the Obvious Depends upon My Ability to Reason

Let us review. I began by pointing out an obvious fact about our moral lives, viz., sometimes, we are motivated to do something because it is obvious to us that we must do it. Michael Smith thinks that, in order for this obvious fact to motivate us, it must consist at least partly in some desire; in Section 1, I rebutted his argument for that claim. Michael Huemer thinks that, in order for this obvious fact to motivate us, it must consist in some ethical intuitions; in Section 2, I rebutted his argument for that claim. So now we must ask: how should we understand the motivating power of obvious moral facts, if not in terms of either desires or appearances? What else could the source of our motivation be?

To approach my answer, consider an extremely simple case. I am choosing between the minestrone soup and the wonton soup. I like both, they cost the same, and they will be ready equally quickly. I reflect for a moment, and find that at this moment I desire the wonton soup more than I desire the minestrone. So I decide to order the wonton. In such a case, what motivates me to decide to order the wonton? Simply this: that, at this moment, I desire the wonton more than I desire the minestrone. It is this relation between my desires that motivates me to order the wonton. And I can become aware of this relation between my desires simply by reflecting on them. Such reflection is neither infallible nor omniscient: it sometimes leads me to believe falsehoods about my desires, and sometimes fails to lead me to believe truths about my desires. But when the reflection is successful, and leads me to believe truths about my desires, it typically does not do so by generating appearances on the basis of which I can make more or less justified judgments about my desires. Reflection on my desires, when it is successful, makes me conscious of the relation between those desires. Thus, it makes me aware of that relation in a way that is unmediated by appearances or evidence, in the way that my awareness of my own consciousness is generally unmediated by appearances or evidence. (If we want to insist that all justified judgment is based on evidence, then we could put this same point by saying that the only evidence that I am conscious is simply: that I am conscious. The contents of our consciousness are their own evidence.) So, in the ordinary case that I have just described, what motivates me to order the wonton soup is a relation between my desires—a relation of which I can (at least sometimes) become conscious by reflection alone, and not on the basis of any further evidence.

Reflection can make us directly aware of features of our own consciousness. Of course, it may be a necessary condition of our becoming directly aware by reflection alone of some features of our own consciousness that we also have some empirical evidence: for instance, I now have some visual and tactile evidence that there is a computer in front of me, and that I am typing on its keyboard. By reflection alone, I can become directly aware of my having this perceptual evidence. But it is a necessary condition of my becoming aware of this by reflection alone that I have this perceptual evidence. That does not show that my awareness of having this evidence is empirical: my awareness of having the evidence is a priori, even if my having empirical evidence is a necessary condition of my knowing a priori that I have this evidence.

I have used the term “reflection” as a label for the kind of privileged epistemic access that I have to my own conscious states. But I have so far characterized reflection in two ways: (a) it is the kind of epistemic access that I have to my own conscious states and (b) the access that it provides is a priori, even when it is a necessary condition of my having such access to something that I also have empirical evidence. What makes the access a priori is that it is not *constituted* by that empirical evidence, even when it requires me to have such evidence. An indication of this is that, while I can have an empirical belief that is false but nonetheless reveals no rational defect on my part, I cannot have an a priori belief that is false but that reveals no rational defect on my part: a priori error always involves some rational defect, even if a completely normal and excusable one.

Just as we can come to know features of our own consciousness a priori, so too we can come to know various necessary truths a priori, for example, that $0 = 0$, or that entailment is transitive, or that nothing can both exist and not exist at the same time. This is not to say that it is impossible to become aware of these truths empirically. Nor, again, is it to say that we are infallible or omniscient with respect to such truths. It is only to say that when we do become a priori aware of these truths, we become aware of them not on the justificatory basis of appearances or evidence. And again, it may be a necessary condition of our gaining a priori knowledge of these truths that we also have some empirical evidence (for instance, the truths themselves might employ concepts that we could not have unless we had some empirical evidence). But again, the point is not that we can become a priori aware of these truths even if we had no empirical evidence—it is rather that our a priori justification for believing these truths, and our a priori knowledge of them, is not even partly constituted by appearances or evidence.

We have a priori access to our own states of consciousness, and also to various necessary truths. What makes such a priori access reliable? What makes its true deliverances count as knowledge? These are important and complex questions, to which many different answers have been offered.¹⁰ But we don't need to commit ourselves to any specific answer in order to recognize the questions as good ones, concerning the

¹⁰ My favorite answer to these questions is the one offered in Bengson 2015.

epistemic credentials of a power that an agent must have if she is to be able to know what rationality demands of her, and so be answerable to those demands. Rationality demands not merely that an agent think and act in certain ways, but that she think and act in those ways *because rationality demands it*. An agent can satisfy such demands only if she is capable of knowing what rationality demands of her, and such knowledge can all be acquired a priori.

There is nothing controversial about the view that we have a priori access to *de se* psychological facts or necessary facts in the way that I have described. What is more controversial is *precisely which* psychological facts or necessary facts can be disclosed to us in this way. But consider the following claim: it is wrong to steal. If we know this to be true at all, it is plausible that we know it to be true a priori. Is such a priori knowledge based on our understanding of the concepts of *stealing* and of *wrongness*? Is it based rather on our imaginative grasp of what it is like to be a person living in society, and needing a certain amount of predictable norm compliance from others? Although I have my views about the right way to answer these questions,¹¹ those views are not relevant to my purpose here, which is simply to make plausible the claim that one of the facts that we know by reflection alone is this: stealing is wrong.

So I know by reflection alone that stealing is wrong, and I know empirically that if I do not return the money to Snelling under my present circumstances, then I am stealing. Reasoning from these two premises leads me to know that I must return the money to Snelling, and also leads me to do so. I am not motivated by my desires, even if it is true that I must have some desires in order to be motivated by my a priori knowledge of the wrongness of stealing. I am not motivated by appearances, even if it is true that I must enjoy some appearances in order to be motivated by my a priori knowledge of the wrongness of stealing. What motivates me to return the money is the fact that stealing is wrong—a fact that is obvious to me a priori.

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¹¹ I suspect that it is the latter, and not the former, of the two questions that marks out the right way to understand the kind of reflection that enables us to know that stealing is wrong: such knowledge is synthetic a priori.

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