**Assessing Experimentally the Intuitive Support for the Demandingness Objection to Consequentialism: A Proposal**

**Abstract.** Can morality be so demanding that we have reason not to follow its dictates? According to many, it can, if that morality is a consequentialist one. We take the plausibility and coherence of this objection – the Demandingness Objection – as a given and are also not concerned with finding the best response to the Objection. Instead, our main theoretical aim is to spell out the intuitive background of the Objection and to see how this background could be investigated. This double aim leads to different albeit connected threads of inquiry. We first outline the Objection, its different forms and how intuition figures in them. After this, we move on to consider the ongoing debate about the use of intuitions in (moral) philosophy with a focus on two challenges: what intuitions are and how we can find them. To answer these challenges, we propose an account according to which moral intuitions are quasi-perceptual seemings that are characterized by being non-inferential, spontaneous, non-doxastic, phenomenologically distinctive, non-sensory, intrinsically motivating, and stable. Armed with these seven “markers” of moral intuition, we put forward experimental designs testing some of these markers. We argue that, and show how, cognitive science can ascertain whether intuitions supporting the Objection share the markers of moral intuitions.

**Keywords.** Consequentialism, demandingness objection, moral intuitions, experimental methodology, moral psychology, cognitive science

**I. Introduction**

It is commonly held that philosophical intuitions have some evidential value; they count in favour or against philosophical theories and approaches. Perhaps nowhere is this evidential role of intuition more important than in both moral theory and (empirical) moral psychology. For moral theory, such supposed intuitions form, among others, the basis of claims that consequentialism is inherently over-demanding: The Demandingness Objection (henceforth: Objection). But is this charge correct? Perhaps, but we think that, before any such verdict can be reached, it is important to empirically flesh-out the supposed intuitive basis of the Objection. In this paper, we explain the Objection (section II) and theorizing on intuitions (section III) before we propose an account of moral intuitions as quasi-perceptual seemings that are characterized by being non-inferential, spontaneous, non-doxastic, phenomenologically distinctive, non-sensory, intrinsically motivating, and stable (section IV). We then go on to explore the difficulties in empirically testing for these “markers” of moral intuition (section V) before outlining a series of empirical studies that could, ultimately, shed light on the evidential value of the intuitions behind the Objection (section VI). In doing so, we also draw attention to the failure of much (empirical) moral psychology and cognitive (neuro)science to give proper consideration to the ontology and experimental epistemology of moral intuition: Philosophical reflection and analysis reveals that not every moral judgment is based on intuition and that not every intuition is a moral intuition. Drawing on insights from epistemology, moral philosophy, and cognitive (neuro)science, our account offers an integrative conceptual analysis and empirical directions for advancing both moral theory and the cognitive (neuro)science of morality.

**II. The Demandingness Objection to consequentialism**

It isn’t saying much to claim that morality is demanding; the question, rather, is: can morality be so demanding that we have reason not to follow its dictates? According to many, it can, if that morality is a *consequentialist* one. Why is this?

To answer this question[[1]](#footnote-1), we need first to understand what consequentialism is. Consequentialism, in its most general sense, is the view that normative properties depend only on consequences. This general approach can then be applied at different levels to different normative properties of different kinds of things, but the most prominent example is consequentialism about the moral rightness of acts. This act-consequentialism holds that whether an act is morally right, depends only on the valuable consequences of that act. More precisely, in its classical form which we will not question in this paper, promotion is understood as maximization. Thus, its single principle, often called the principle of beneficence, gives us the act-consequentialist criterion of rightness: “act in such a way as to produce the best possible consequences.” The Objection originally targeted only utilitarians who advocated consequentialism with a welfarist theory of value, that is, a theory that focuses on human welfare as the relevant consequence. However, the Objection can be employed against any form of act-consequentialism (henceforth: consequentialism) that involves maximization.

What exactly does the Objection say?[[2]](#footnote-2) It is built upon two pillars: one, that consequentialism is excessively demanding and, two, that an adequate morality shouldn’t be excessively demanding. Consequentialism requires the agent to promote the good until the point where further efforts would burden the agent as much as they would benefit others. However, the situation that determines what would be best overall is far from ideal: today’s world involves, for example, significant levels of poverty that prevailing levels of charitable donations are insufficient to eradicate.[[3]](#footnote-3) Given that acting to alleviate poverty is likely to have, in sum, better consequences than pursuing individual goals and projects, it seems unavoidable that, if one accepts consequentialism, one must devote most of one’s resources to humanitarian projects. At the same time, most would agree that this cannot be right, that people should not be required to sacrifice their lives for morality. This is the second pillar of the Objection. Its function is to ground a constraint on admissible moral theories requiring them to avoid excessive demands. If they do not, the conclusion follows that these theories cannot be morally correct and, as such, guide people’s conduct.

In short, the Objection claims that consequentialism’s excessive demands are objectionable. We can put this charge somewhat more formally as the conclusion of an argument in the following general form:

1. Consequentialism makes demand D;
2. Demand D is an excessive and therefore objectionable demand;

Therefore,

1. Consequentialism is objectionably demanding;
2. If a moral theory is objectionably demanding, then it should be rejected;

Therefore,

1. Consequentialism should be rejected.

This general form acquires a specific reading depending on how the clause “excessive and therefore objectionable” is spelled out: what in one’s view is objectionable about excessive consequentialist demands. In particular, the way we have introduced the objection is compatible with three different versions of premise 2) and a fourth can be added as an often-mentioned corollary. On the moral reading, consequentialism is claimed to be *wrongfully* demanding since it requires agents to make sacrifices that they are not, in fact, morally required to make as they are excessive. On the rational reading, consequentialism is held to be *unreasonably* demanding since it requires agents to make sacrifices that they do not have decisive reason to make since they are excessive. Third, on the motivational reading, consequentialism is taken to be *motivationally* overexerting because it pictures agents as moral saints who can bring themselves to do whatever morality asks of them no matter how excessive it is. A fourth, epistemic reading of the objection, holds that consequentialism is *epistemically* challenging because it requires agents to be (nearly) all-knowing when it comes to the consequences of their actions or because it makes agents in some other way severely epistemically disadvantaged (e.g., it requires them to understand a very complex principle or have outstanding computational abilities).

A lot can be said about the different readings and how they are responded to.[[4]](#footnote-4) We connect with one of these responses but our primary interest lies not in the response itself but in the mechanism behind the response. The targeted claim is the one in premise 2). This premise is normally taken to rely, at least in part, on an intuition.[[5]](#footnote-5) This makes sense since intuitions, as we explain below, are often taken to be evidence for moral theories, i.e., as providing a pre-theoretical vantage point from which the different theories can be evaluated and contrasted with one another. This being so, one of way of rejecting the premise is with reference to its alleged intuitive grounding. The rejection can take two forms. Either the premise can be rejected by denying the existence of the particular intuition in question, or arguing that we have reason not to rely on it as evidence. The former route is rarely discussed in the literature, which the latter predominates taking typically two forms. One targets the specific “demandingness-intuition” in question, the other targets intuitions in general.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We have an interest in both versions of the response, although our focus is on the first one. To establish such a response, one must find a way of detecting intuitions. To do so, several answers should be in place. First, short of the ability to treat, in this regard at least, all four readings of the Objection as one, we need to choose our preferred reading. This paper focuses on the moral reading of the Objection. This is the historically most influential version and it is also the one that is most discussed today. It is also the reading of the Objection that most suits our experimental methodology to be presented below. This already gives away the second important step: the aim of such methodology is to give us tools to examine the existence and spread of certain intuitions. But to work out such methodology, we need to deal with at least some of the issues that the second form of the response raises: we need to be able to tell what intuitions are and how we can find them. That is, we need to engage with the ongoing debate about intuitions.

**III. The debate about intuitions**

Why is it so crucial that the Objection is based on an *intuition* rather than merely an opinion? We have already signaled what the answer is.Intuitions matter for a philosopher because they are typically taken to have evidential value.[[7]](#footnote-7) Like observations in science, intuitions are the raw data that competing moral theories should at least try to accommodate: If an intuition counts in favour of a theory, this is good for the theory; if an intuition counts against a theory, this is bad for the theory. To be more precise, intuitions can be considered as evidence in two ways: i) they offer defeasible justification to believe that *p* or ii) they provide an initially credible starting point in a process of seeking reflective equilibrium. The former is a foundational approach; the latter is a coherentist approach in epistemology. In both cases, intuitions are not taken to be *decisive* evidence, however. There can be grounds to discount intuitions, or, as mentioned above, even not to take them into consideration. It is also possible that, on balance and compared to other theories, a moral theory turns out to be the best available even though it has counterintuitive implications.

However, there is a range of dissenting voices. Among the many criticisms of the idea that intuitions can be used as evidence, two are directly relevant for conducting experimental research in philosophy.[[8]](#footnote-8) The first concerns the question of *what intuitions are*; the problem being that in the absence of a proper characterization intuitions appear to be strange, *a priori*, (perhaps) Platonic entities that philosophers, especially those with naturalistic inclinations, have trouble accepting.[[9]](#footnote-9) The second objection to using intuitions as evidence is more methodological. The idea is that given what intuitions are (that is, given an answer to the first problem), there are insurmountable problems concerning their empirical investigation. In other words, the challenge is *how to find intuitions*, even if we know what they are.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Our position is then this. To put the particular response to the Objection in motion, it is crucial to define what (moral) intuitions are and how one can actually learn what (moral) intuitions people hold: The (assumed) nature of (moral) intuitions at least in part determines the particular investigative methods we can employ to detect such intuitions. Moreover, the ongoing debate about intuitions also encourages us to work with a clear account since there are many who doubt the evidential value of intuitions. This is therefore the task we turn to – taking up the ontology and experimental methodology of moral intuitions – in the next two sections.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**IV. Theoretical foundations: What are (moral) intuitions?**

Start with the more basic question: what are intuitions? There are three sides to this question. One concerns the ontology of evidence: what is evidence? One answer is to hold that whatever justifies your believing *that p,* that is, whatever plays the role of justifier, is your evidence. Since we assume that intuitions are justifiers – understood as intuit*ings*, i.e., attitudes – intuitions meet the criteria for evidence. The typical alternative to this account is to hold that one’s evidence consists of considerations that epistemically count in favor of or against holding certain of one’s beliefs. That is, on this view evidence is what is intuit*ed*, namely, a proposition. Both accounts have their problems but in this paper, it is not our task to argue for either.[[12]](#footnote-12) In what follows, building on Pust (2016, §2.4), we assume the following picture is correct: intuit*ings,* which are attitudes, are what qualify what is intuit*ed*, which is a proposition as evidence, by justifying one’s belief in that proposition.[[13]](#footnote-13) When in the rest of the paper we talk about intuitions as (providing) evidence, this is the picture we will have in mind.

The second side of our starting question concerns the *ontology of intuitions*: what kind of things are intuitions? We have already given an initial answer: intuitions are intuit*ings*, that is, attitudes. Once this basic commitment is in place, the literature supports the following views (Ibid., §1). Intuitions can be i) beliefs, ii) dispositions to believe, iii) some kind of *sui generis* mental state, and iv) desires. The position we advocate falls in iii): we understand (moral) intuitions as quasi-perceptual seemings that are characterized by a set of specific “markers”, which we delineate below. Unlike beliefs, perceptions are typically taken to provide defeasible evidence in epistemology. Since intuitions on our favored reading are modelled on perception, the same is true of them.

Of course, there is much more to be said here. As for the analogy with perception, we will presently provide more details. For the wider issues concerning the epistemic status of intuitions, we have to rest content with declaration of the underlying positions. The typical background for taking seemings/appearances – perceptual or intuitive – to be providing defeasible evidence (or having initial credibility) is what is called *epistemic liberalism* (Huemer 2005, Koksvik 2011).[[14]](#footnote-14) At the same time, epistemic liberalism doesn’t allow just any kind of seeming to be evidence-providing: the seeming in question must possess certain characteristics in virtue of which this role is granted to it. One approach is to hold that this happens if the seeming is a reliable indicator of the truth of its content (due, e.g., to the nature of that content or to the etiology of the seeming); another approach says that the seeming must possess a certain kind of phenomenology with respect to its content (Chudnoff 2014, 13-4). This paper accepts epistemic liberalism and we suspect that our final position on what intuitions are mixes the two approaches just mentioned – however, we do not argue for any of these claims in the paper.

This takes us to the third side of our original question: what are the central *markers* of intuitions and moral intuitions in particular? Here we must spend some more time explaining our position partly because of the complexity of the question and partly because the markers we put forward as central largely determine the direction and design of our empirical programme. The literature discusses a range of relevant features[[15]](#footnote-15); of these we will focus on the following ones as central:

1. Intuitions are *non-inferential*.[[16]](#footnote-16) There are two ways to understand this claim (Jenkins 2014, 94): epistemologically and psychologically. The former is the idea that intuitions must not depend epistemically on previously justified propositions. The latter is the idea that intuitions are non-inferentially arrived at: they are not the result of reasoning or inference. We are inclined to accept both readings with two caveats. Those who put forward this marker of intuitions rarely distinguish between conscious and non-conscious inference when it comes to the psychological reading. Given the psychological and the specialist philosophy literature (cf. Mikhail 2011, 175; Harman et. al. 2011), it seems necessary not to rule out non-conscious inferential processes. Second, at least in a coherentist framework, as van Roojen (2014) forcefully argues, lack of inference may not always be required. This happens if the intuition in question coheres well and is thus inferentially supported by other similar responses that add to the stock of information the content of the intuition originally contains.
2. Intuitions are *spontaneous*. Mikhail (2011, 143), who follows Rawls, takes this to mean that intuitions are unconsciously and unintentionally arrived at (this is often put as the idea that intuitions are not under our voluntary control, as in Kauppinen 2013, 362). This clearly relates to what Haidt (2001, 818) calls “immediacy”: that “intuition occurs quickly, effortlessly, and automatically, such that the outcome but not the process is accessible to consciousness.” Note also that since we want lack of inference in the psychological sense, spontaneity implies at least the weaker psychological reading we have opted for: that no conscious inference should be present in intuiting. (In fact, many – like Kauppinen ibid. - understand spontaneity as involving lack of inference, period. However, as we point out, to rule out non-conscious inference is to part ways with contemporary cognitive science, not a move we are comfortable with).
3. Intuitions are *non-doxastic* (Bealer 1998; Koksvik 2011, 45). They are not beliefs since we can have an intuition but not the belief. As with perception: when you have a perceptual illusion and know about this, you do not believe what you perceive to be the case. Also, when someone intuits that *p* but does not believe that *p*, she is not similarly rationally criticisable as when someone believes that *p* and believes that *not-p* at the same time. This marker also opens the door to distinguishing moral judgments from moral intuitions while holding onto some form of cognitivism about both: We can say that moral judgments express beliefs that are caused, in a perceptual way, by moral intuitions (perhaps construed along quasi-perceptual lines). This gives clear meaning to the idea that moral judgments are *based* on moral intuitions.
4. Intuitions have *distinctive phenomenology* (Jenkins 2014, 94-5). They feel in a specific way (e.g., we feel that we reach into the things themselves when we have the experience). In particular, their phenomenal character accounts for the fact that intuitions are primitively compelling: they attract us to believe something just by themselves (Kauppinen 2013).[[17]](#footnote-17) This does not rule out that different intuitions feel differently. In fact, Kauppinen (2013, 365-6; 2015a, 4-5) argues that specifically moral intuitions have a phenomenology that is different from the way epistemic, logical or linguistic intuitions feel: their phenomenology is richer and more diverse. However, this can be accommodated by, for example, endorsing Chudnoff’s (2011) idea that intuitions are constituted by a collection of simpler thoughts.
5. Intuitions are *non-sensory* (Bealer 1998; Huemer 2005, 102; Koksvik 2011). They are not based on sensory or introspective sources either directly or indirectly via memory[[18]](#footnote-18), but on merely thinking about a proposition. Intuitions in this regard are unlike sensory perception: there is no pre-seeming experience on which an intuition is based. The only source of an intuition is the agent’s conscious thinking about a proposition (Sosa 2014, 46-8).[[19]](#footnote-19) At the same time, intuitions can be - albeit need not be - regarded as quasi-perceptual since they otherwise share many features with sensory perception (they are non-doxastic; they feel in a particular way; they are not based on (conscious) inference).
6. Specifically moral intuitions are *intrinsically motivating* (Kauppinen 2013, 366; 2015a, 5-6; 2015b; Chudnoff 2014, 24-7). That is, they motivate by themselves, without the help of anything else (which doesn’t mean that they necessarily motivate – there are conditions (e.g. depression, accidie) that can break the connection between motivation and moral intuition). The relevance of this for us is that this implies that insofar as intuitions are construed along cognitivist lines, they end up on the non-Humean side of the motivational divide in philosophy.[[20]](#footnote-20) Either they are “pure” cognitive states that motivate or they are states that are both cognitive and conative (some would say that they have two directions of fit, not just one: mind-to-world and world-to-mind). A further implication is that, since there are people who seem to be unmoved by their moral beliefs (without any conditions present that would explain the break-down of the connection between belief and motivation), this suggests again that (moral) intuitions are non-doxastic.[[21]](#footnote-21) Finally, recall the possibility to separate moral judgment (as belief) from moral intuition, this would also help us maintain internalism about moral intuitions while endorsing externalism about moral judgments.[[22]](#footnote-22)
7. Finally, intuitions are *stable* (Mikhail 2011, 243). For philosophers, this condition matters because it helps to elevate intuitions to the level of considered judgments, or, as they were recently called, robust intuitions (as opposed to the immediate reactions of surface intuitions; for the distinction see Kauppinen 2007). These are those spontaneous responses of the agent that have, so to speak, withstood the test of reflection: They are those (surface) intuitions that a competent judge would retain under sufficiently ideal conditions, such as when the judge is not biased (Liao 2008). In fact, as many emphasize (e.g. Kauppinen 2013, 372; 2015b), philosophical intuitions often only arise after intensive inquiry, reflection and scrutiny.

These are then the main markers we take intuitions to have - with the exception of f.) that is taken to hold only for moral intuitions and Kauppinen’s point about d.) concerning the rich and diverse phenomenology of moral intuitions. Importantly, these markers are compatible with or even naturally accompany – as in the case of markers c.) and e.) – the idea that intuitions are quasi-perceptual states.

**V. Theoretical foundations: How to detect moral intuitions?**

How can we detect moral intuitions as defined above? Given our account of moral intuitions a particular methodology offers itself: focus on detecting the relevant markers in order to separate moral intuitions from other mental attitudes. At the same time, space and resources are limited. Therefore, at least in this paper, we will not put forward a complete experimental methodology that has different methods to test each marker separately. Instead, we focus on two markers – spontaneity and stability – that are perhaps the easiest to investigate with existing empirical methods in social psychology. In addition, we also introduce a controversial idea linking moral intuitions to moral emotions to cover the two specifically moral markers – intrinsic motivation, rich and diverse phenomenology – as well as, perhaps, the other remaining markers. We will, however, also raise some critical points about the alleged link instead of endorsing it without reservations. That is, although we think this may be a promising new investigative approach, it is not without its – theoretical as well as empirical – problems.

Let us then turn to the details and problems of the proposed methodology. In this section, we would like to highlight some theoretical issues before turning to our more empirical proposals in the next section. Testing *spontaneity* is the easiest task since this is a central focus of psychological research on intuitive processes (Glöckner & Witteman 2010). Much of this research is based on dual-process models of reasoning and social behavior (e.g., Evans 2008). These models propose a distinction between rational, controlled processes (often called analytical-rational or System 1 processes), on the one hand, and automatic, associative, affect-based processes (often called intuitive-experiential or System 2 processes), on the other. System 1 processes are supposed to operate quickly and with low levels of mental effort and conscious awareness. They therefore, at least in part (see our remarks below), capture the spontaneity marker of intuitions. Standard experimental paradigms are available to test the role of System 1 processes in reasoning. These include, in particular, placing participants under stringent time constraints (Horstmann, Hausmann, & Ryf 2010) or adding cognitive load (i.e., a second task that has to be completed in parallel to the focal task; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Both methods rely on inhibiting System 2 processes. The underlying rationale is that once conscious reasoning is precluded from operating, what is left are System 1 processes that generate spontaneous responses.

However, while psychologists tend to focus only on System 1 processes when searching for intuitions, we must go beyond this restricted endeavour.[[23]](#footnote-23)21 This is so for several reasons. As Kuappinen (2013, 372; 2015b) shows, our proposed picture of intuitions does not entirely fit the psychology literature: some System 1 intuitions would qualify as philosophical intuitions, others wouldn’t. It is not just that System 1 processes often result in false beliefs (think of the heuristics and biases approach as in Kahneman et al., 1982) or that on other occasions they give us true beliefs that however emerge from quick and dirty inferences. It is also that System 1 processes are not guaranteed to produce quasi-perceptual seemings (as opposed to beliefs) and of course they by design do not involve any System 2 process. Consequently, none of the other markers – with, perhaps, the exception of lack of (conscious) inference - are likely to be detected by relying solely on System 1 processes. Markers having to do with the non-sensory, non-doxastic, intrinsically motivating, phenomenologically peculiar nature of moral intuitions cannot be tested exclusively in this way. And the marker of stability offers an even more clear-cut case. System 1 processes, by definition, involve no reflection, no reasoning, nothing that could be used to test stability as we understand it.

We thus need to look for complementary methods to test these other markers. Take *stability*, our other focus in this section. Recall, the idea here is twofold. There is first the requirement that the spontaneously emerging attitudes we detect must also withstand the test of reflection over time. Hence, similar to research addressing the spontaneity of intuitions, studies examining their stability will also attempt to elicit spontaneous moral responses. However, in a second step, these studies shall engage conscious, analytical-rational (System 2) mental processes to further examine whether the spontaneous responses stand the “test of reflection” and therefore acquire the marker of stability. At the same time, as we already noted, the order of the emergence of a moral intuition can also be reversed. Namely, it is possible that reflection and reasoning are needed for the intuition to emerge spontaneously, i.e., System 2 processes must in this case precede the operation of System 1 processes.

Testing stability raises its own concern, though. On a version of the dual process theory System 1 processes are inherently non-consequentialist because consequentialist views emerge from non-intuitive (“rational”) processes characteristic of System 2 (Greene 2007). This suggests that, given our particular moral problematic – namely, the intuitive basis of the Demandingness Objection to consequentialism - we need to focus only on stability, setting aside the other markers of (moral) intuitions. However, this paints an oversimplified picture of the moral psychological landscape in many ways: System 1 processes are intuitive, affective and non-consequentialist; System 2 processes are not intuitive, non-affective and consequentialist. We have already stated that we don’t agree that only System 1 processes give us intuitions. But there seems also ground to question the claim that consequentialism must find support only in System 2 processes. Indeed, Mikhail’s (2011) formal computational model, reflecting the kind of moral intuitions or “considered judgments” we characterise, includes a “moral calculus” for attributing, ranking, and comparing the probabilities of an action’s good and bad effects. This System 1 process seems to bare some of the building blocks of consequentialism yet clearly displays unconscious and affective properties. Again, it should be borne in mind that some of the leading advocates of dual-process approaches to moral psychology do not think that the simple System 1 vs. System 2 distinction reflects what is actually happening in the moral mind-brain (Cushman 2013; Huebner 2015). In fact, prominent dual-process researchers have long admitted the heterogeneity within each “system” and the failure to map all of the proposed attributes of particular mental processes on to the two systems (Evans 2008). While the dual-process approach offers a useful distinction for the start of scientific inquiry into morality, and for combating a strange commitment that mental states must be accessible to consciousness (Searle 1990; Chomsky 1990), it, like the associated dependency on the emotion vs. cognition, may be holding up our understanding and theoretical explanation of our moral psychology.

Let us then, at least provisionally, accept that spontaneity and stability are testable markers, certainly from a theoretical angle. What about the other markers? As already noted, both space (in this paper) and resources (in the world) preclude us from presenting methods to separately investigate the other remaining five markers (which doesn’t rule out, of course, that a large research project can be dedicated to such endeavor). Instead, we would like to offer – with all its pros and cons – a controversial proposal. In moral philosophy, it has become customary to link morality to the emotions and there is also growing psychological literature on the subject.[[24]](#footnote-24) But our needs are special: we need, first of all, very strong involvement of moral emotion in the agent’s moral psychology; and we need this involvement to give a role to moral intuition. To our knowledge, there is one fitting proposal on the table: Kauppinen’s (2013) Humean theory of moral intuition.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Kauppinen’s view is that moral intuitions are emotional manifestations of moral sentiments (of, typically, approbation and disapprobation, praise and blame); in short, they are constituted by moral emotions (typically: anger, guilt, admiration, resentment and the like). The idea is that moral emotions are felt moral intuitions. That is, they are felt affective states that involve a quasi-perceptual seeming concerning the rightness or wrongness of the situation or whatever other property their target is supposed to have (the so-called “formal object” of the emotion). To take an example, your moral intuition that cheating on one’s spouse is wrong receives the following treatment on this account. Your sentiment of moral disapprobation towards cheating on one’s spouse manifests itself in (moral) anger towards someone who cheats on their spouse and the anger you feel presents the person’s action as morally wrong. That is, it *seems* to you that the person’s action is wrong and this *is* just your moral intuition constituted by your moral emotion of anger.

There is of course a lot to be done to work out this account in sufficient detail: it needs a fitting cognitive theory of emotion; it needs to tell us what makes an emotion moral; it has to tackle challenges from the meta-ethics and moral psychology literature. Much of this work has been done in Kauppinen’s writings (2013, 2015a, 2015b) and we don’t have the space to present it here. Instead, as promised, we would like to point to certain misgivings that some, especially on the cognitive psychology side, might have with this account that are not covered by Kauppinen himself. The reservations concern primarily the empirical data involved – after all, as is the case with any science, our picture changes as the data comes in, hypotheses are tested, and technologies are developed and deployed in order to generate new insights. Concerning newer data, Huebner’s (2015) assessment of the empirical literature is that there is little to no real evidence that emotion constitutes our moral knowledge or intuitions.[[26]](#footnote-26) Moreover, the empirical data can be interpreted as being consistent with the idea that emotion acts only to modulate, rather than constitute, moral intuitions (Ibid). Finally, recent models of moral cognition, inspired by computational neuroscience approaches to reinforcement learning, suggest that moral intuition and judgement are the result of computations over mental representations, some with affective or value-based properties (Cushman 2013; Huebner 2015). These basic decision and learning models attribute value to outcomes without the need for more complex affective states like emotion. Such models apply to a range of organisms that display such reinforcement learning. It would be hard to conceptualize many of these organism as possessing emotions; at least as emotion is understood in the affective and cognitive (neuro)sciences.

Setting now the above reservations aside (should they be confirmed, we would have to tone down the connection to emotions but everything else in our proposal would remain intact), we believe that our methodological approach to assessing moral intuitions positively transcends the strong reliance of research in experimental moral philosophy and moral psychology on self-reports of moral judgments.[[27]](#footnote-27) Huebner (2011) as well as Kauppinen (2015b) have recently argued that such experiments alone cannot establish the intuitive basis (understood primarily in terms of the spontaneity marker) of moral judgments. Although no single study we propose in the next section would achieve this goal either (and it can be doubted whether such a study is even a possibility), we believe that our multi-method approach would increase understanding of the intuitive processes involved in judging the demandingness of consequentialist requirements in particular, and in making moral judgments more generally.[[28]](#footnote-28)22

**VI. Empirical investigations: a proposal**

As promised, in this last substantial section of the paper, we would like to briefly outline the *experimental* work – in the form of psychological studies - that could implement our proposed methodology.[[29]](#footnote-29) These studies are designed to examine the empirical basis of the Demandingness Objection in four empirical experiments (Studies 1-4) each of which corresponds to a part of the aforementioned methodological approach. That is, the idea is that each study makes sure that a specific marker of moral intuition is in place and once this is ascertained, it examines whether the Objection is supported by the results. Once all the results are in place, we compare them to see if they provide us with a coherent picture and a clear conclusion. The expectation is that the studies will find that 1) there is an increasing *tendency* towards non-consequentialist responses as demands increase, but that 2) the *absolute* level of dissent with consequentialism is not such that it is warranted to speak about a *widespread* intuition. In this latter case, we expect that the intuitively supported premise of the Objection will *not* be decisively confirmed.[[30]](#footnote-30)

*Study 1* is designed to test *spontaneity* by examining whether moral intuitions are similar across processing modes within a given individual. Participants will respond to scenarios used previously to examine the empirical basis of the Objection[[31]](#footnote-31). Before they do so, the study will manipulate the degree to which individuals engage in analytical-rational versus intuitive-experiential processing and examine the effects of this manipulation on moral responses. The underlying assumption is that participants will engage in analytical-rational processing if they have the cognitive capacity to do so. Using methods borrowed from cognitive science, the study aims to manipulate cognitive capacity with a standard cognitive load manipulation, thereby increasing participants’ reliance on more intuitive-experiential processes in the high- vs. low-load conditions. This is done by asking them to perform a dot memory task in which they have to memorize either a complex/high-load pattern (see “a” in Fig. 1) or simple/low-load (see “b” in Fig. 1) in parallel to their moral judgement task. Although such manipulations are common in psychological decision-making research, applications to the moral judgment domain are rarer. Thus, this study could provide evidence as to whether participants’ responses to scenarios consistent with eliciting the demandingness intuition occur in an immediate and spontaneous manner. If they do, this will support the idea that those judgments were made on the basis of intuitions. Given research that has suggested that consequentialist judgements are suppressed in conditions of cognitive load (Greene et al. 2008), if spontaneous responses are still more consistent with consequentialism than the Objection then this would be strong evidence that the any Objection-consistent judgements are based on intuitions that lack the spontaneity marker.

*Study 2* is designed to address whether the moral intuition underlying the Objection is *stable*. To do so, the study aims to use an adapted think-aloud procedure to identify participants’ reasoning processes while they are making moral judgments. Participants will be trained to continuously verbalize their thoughts while responding to morally challenging scenarios similar to those used in previous research.[[32]](#footnote-32) The study is designed also to manipulate whether or not participants are encouraged to reflect in detail on their immediate responses. Thus, some participants will be led to subject their initial responses to a thorough “test of reflection”. The study therefore focuses on robust intuitions or considered judgments and examines whether the intuition postulated by the Objection, if found, belongs to this group. This can happen, as described before, in two ways: either the intuitions spontaneously emerge from the reflection process or an already “existing” intuition is affirmed by the same process.

*Study 3* is designed to test whether demandingness intuitions share the morally-specific property of being *intrinsically motivating*. To examine this, the study aims to use empirical methods from the science of motivation. We will examine if the increasing tendency towards non-consequentialist decisions, as demands increase, is associated with greater moral (vs. self-enhancement) motivation. Directly after giving their moral responses participants will complete an approach-avoidance IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998). Using behavioral dimensions (i.e., approach vs. avoidance) to categorize moral (e.g., generous, helpful, empathic, solidarity) vs. self-enhancement (ambitious, successful, influential, prestige) attributes will enable us to indirectly (implicitly) measure whether the Objection effect is associated with increases in moral (vs. self-enhancement) motivation.

*Study 4* turns to the alleged *emotional* aspect of moral intuitions. It is designed to draw on cognitive theories of emotion to provide some insight into whether the Objection is intuitively supported. It employs a novel unobtrusive test targeting the nonverbal behavior associated with moral emotions. Emotions marking individual moral transgressions – such as shame and some forms of embarrassment – are reliably related to (a) decreased body expansion, (b) averted gaze, and (c) downward head tilt. The idea is to make use of the novel tool of automated face and posture video analysis (e.g., FaceReaderTM software) to assess the degree to which participants experience such emotions while making moral decisions. Although this technique has been used in other areas of affective and clinical sciences, it has not, as of yet, been used in moral cognition research. This form of assessment largely avoids response biases that may influence self-reports of emotion while retaining the ability to make inferences concerning relatively specific emotions. Because emotions in response to fictitious scenarios may differ from emotions experienced in real decision situations, the study will investigate whether the intuition underlying the Objection can be observed in the emotions experienced in decisions with real-world consequences. Evidently, these decisions cannot involve equally serious implications as those described in the scenarios. However, economic games (such as the ones used in Study 1 and 2), provide an established framework to investigate decision making with real monetary outcomes. In addition to participants’ explicit moral judgments, the aim is to analyze their nonverbal emotional behavior. If emotions constitute moral intuitions, this study would help us establish whether the responses in these scenarios are intuitive or not.

**VII. Summary and concluding remarks**

TheDemandingness Objection is a good example of the way intuitions are used as evidence in moral theorizing. This objection crucially hinges on the assumed evidential value of moral intuitions in that it claims that people *intuit* that consequentialism is (sometimes) unreasonably demanding and *therefore* certain actions demanded by consequentialism are not morally required – hence consequentialism is not the right theory to guide our conduct. This reasoning invites researchers to empirically investigate people’s intuitive assessment of their decisions in experimental situations. Yet, although different moral intuitions have been the topic of substantial empirical research, the intuition underlying the Objection has not yet received any systematic empirical attention. This paper aims to be a first step on the path to remedy this situation. Our proposal focuses on three core questions relevant to the critical discussion of the the Objection: (1) Is the Objection supported by our moral intuitions? (2) What are (moral) intuitions? (3) How can we detect (moral) intuitions? Answering (2) and (3) helps us work out a sophisticated and novel experimental methodology that we can use, through carefully designed experiments, to answer (1). While there is no doubt that more theoretical work can be done to refine the proposed methodology, we are hopeful that the ideas proposed here will give rise to further philosophical and experimental work on the topic.[[33]](#footnote-33)

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1. For a full answer, we would also have to spend time on the issue of why consequentialism is singled out as the *only* objectionably demanding moral theory and whether this is correct or not. For a detailed treatment of this issue, see (*redacted for blind review*), on which this section relies on in part. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Objection is perhaps most clearly stated by those who oppose it. For an early statement see Sidgwick (1907), p. 87; for a recent statement see Cullity (2004), Chapter 1. For further references, see Hooker (2009), p. 162 footnote 4, and Carter (2009), pp. 163-85, as well as the works to be cited later in this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Unfortunately, it is easy to cite statistics for this claim. Any report by the WHO, the World Bank, UNICEF or UNDP paints the same dire picture, certainly of the global situation, but also, in most cases, of domestic circumstances in industrialised countries. See Pogge (2008), pp. 2-3 for more data and references. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There is significant literature on the Objection in its different forms. For further references and discussion of some of the relevant matters see (*redacted for blind review*). Bykvist (2009), Chapter 7 and Mulgan (2007), Chapter 5 also provide a good introduction to the debate. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We say “at least in part” because, certainly in the case of the motivational and epistemic reading, the more general applicability constraint that generates these complaints can be driven also by moral or conceptual arguments. See Smith (1989: 117-8) for a good discussion. Similar, theory-laden grounds may be found for the other readings as well, but it is hard to deny their intuitive appeal. See e.g., how Portmore (2011), Chapter 2 introduces the motivation for the rational reading of the Objection or how Bykvist (ib.) and Mulgan (ib.) spell out the background for the moral version of the Objection. It should be noted that Smith also acknowledges the role of common sense in motivating the Objection. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The first route is discussed in (*redacted for bling review*), while the second approach is often called the “strategy of extremism” because its message is that excessive consequentialist demands are not objectionable. The typical way this is then argued is by undermining or discrediting the intuition that the premise relies upon, often as part of a general attack on intuitions. Thus, it is argued that this and, perhaps, other intuitions rest on lack of information, lack of clear thinking, lack of imaginative empathy or on some psychological “failure”, or that they track something entirely different from issues of excessive demands. For references, see Kagan (1989); Singer (1972); Unger (1996). For criticism of some of these ideas, see Cullity (2004); Mulgan (2001). For a brief argument that shares the most affinity with what we are about to present in this paper, see Tedesco (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, among others, Lynch (2006); Sosa (2006). It should be noted though, that there can be other views on what intuitions are good for; see Andow (2015) for a detailed discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There are others, of course. For a good overview, see Appiah (2008); Doris & Stich (2005); Jenkins (2014); for a more specific debate concerning moral intuitions, see Singer (2005); Sandberg & Juth (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For recent contributions to this debate, see Goldman (2007); Hales (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Kauppinen (2007); Podsakoff et al. (2003); for a response, see Nagel (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Some of the ideas to be presented have appeared before in print in a more rudimentary form, see (*redacted for blind review*) for details. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The first is claimed to overly psychologize evidence, the second is accused of neglecting the intuitiveness of the evidence in question. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For what appears to be a similar position, see Chudnoff (2014), p. 14. A possible further way of spelling out the exact role intuition – the attitude – plays in this picture is to consider it as what Dancy (2004), Chapter 2 calls an enabler: a precondition for the proposition *that p* to be evidence. See van Roojen (2014), pp. 159-160 that appears to put forward such an idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In a coherentist framework, an approach like van Roojen’s (2014) can provide further support (should it be needed). On his view, the content of an intuition qualifies as evidence not solely because it is intuited but also because it coheres well with the content of other similar judgments (although he nowhere explains what “similar” amounts to). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Most recently, see the contributions in Booth & Rowbottom (2014) and in Chappel (2015); see also Audi (2015) and the references in the main text. Our approach here is in line, we take it, with Jenkin’s (2014) view that “intuition” is a family resemblance concept. She identifies four bundles of symptoms (what we call “markers” above) and using these she puts forward two types/senses of intuitions: the common-sensical and the a priori. Our proposal in the text is more in line with the first, but, as she also admits, these two senses have several common features. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is often connected to the idea that intuitions are theoretically uncontaminated because they are not inferred from moral theories and principles; see Tersman (2008), van Roojen (2014), Mikhail (2011), Chapter 8 for details. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This might also relate to Hare’s (1981) idea that moral intuitions have “objective flavour”. We can say that such intuitions are compelling because their target appears objective: it’s just wrong. (Perhaps there is also a connection here to the spontaneity of intuitions: we are sure that we see “objectively” when we have them.) Another often mentioned feature here is (felt) necessity (Rawls calls it “certainty”, see Mikhail 2011, 245). See Jenkins (2014), p 95 for details. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. There is a question how strongly one reads “indirectly” here. It shouldn’t be so strong as to rule out obvious ways intuitions are dependent on stimuli. For example, there is often some action to elicit a moral intuition. Which means that it indirectly depends on sensory stimulus or input. Normally this would be visual in terms of watching some action or reading some moral scenario. For sure, this could also be the result of simply thinking about certain propositions but this would have to involve some sensory input indirectly, if only, through the experience necessary to develop concepts and language that are the basis of this internal thinking. One way around this would be to hold that these indirect connections are all *causal*, whereas the dependence mentioned in the text is rational, not causal. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This connects to lack of inference here, of course. However, note that the way we understand this marker does not rule out non-conscious inference, only conscious inference is not permitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Interestingly, while a non-Humean position can be considered as the minority, unorthodox position in philosophy, cognitive (neuro)science is replete with motivational mental states (for examples, see Huebner 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In fact, this connects interestingly to the account some hold of virtuous (moral) perception as opposed to “mere” moral belief. See Little (1997) who interprets John McDowell’s thinking along these lines. Her main idea is that virtuous cognition is like gestalt changes in sensory perception: we can suddenly come to see the dots as Marilyn Monroe’s visage in the pointillist painting. See also Zagzebski’s (2003) account of the thinning of moral judgment. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Take, for instance, the famous case of Huckleberry Finn who helps Jim, the slave, even though he strongly believes (judges) that he (morally) shouldn’t: his moral belief does not move him, but his moral intuition does. Kauppinen (2015a), pp. 246-7 endorses and argues for this view. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. 21 Mikhail (2011) is a notable exception to this trend. Drawing on Rawls, contemporary moral philosophy, and the work of Chomsky in linguistics, Mikhail purposely employs abstract trolley problems that people have little or no experience of such that their moral judgements will better reflect their moral intuitions minus bias, stereotypes and other rehearsed social knowledge. In other words, such that their responses are more likely to be “considered judgements.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek (2007) for a review on psychological research on moral emotions and Schnall et al. (2008) for the claim that disgust can render moral judgments more severe; for a philosophical inquiry into utilitarianism and the moral emotions, see Fehige & Frank (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The nearest candidate is probably Roeser (2011). Sinhababu (2017), Chapter 4 also works out a perceptual theory of moral judgment that in many ways resembles to Kauppinen’s. However, he does not include intuitions in his picture. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Reinforcing this conclusion, a recent meta-analysis of all the available data on the link between the emotion of disgust (the “posterchild” case of the emotion-morality link) suggests that there is little to no statistical evidence of an association between this emotion and moral judgment. Indeed, if you control for publication bias (as is common in meta-analyses) you find no statistical relationship between disgust and moral judgement at all (Landy & Goodwin 2015). See also Pölzler (2015) for a detailed critical analysis of the connection between moral judgment (intuition) and emotion. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. This is not to say, of course, that the field hasn’t developed significantly in this respect since the first survey studies. See, e.g., the chapters in the methodological section of Lütge et. al. (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. 22 We take it that what propose would qualify as a version of the “thickening” approach as described by Weinberg & Alexander (2014). While their criticism of this approach appears reasonable, they do not consider our version that avoids relying on only one “thickening” feature of intuitions. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. What follows are only schematic descriptions of the proposed studies that omit most practical and technical details. Given the general aim of this article and the restricted space at our disposal, we consider this way of proceeding justified. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. There is little related work on this. The work that can be cited and can, to some extent, be considered as pilot work to the studies proposed here is found in (*redacted for blind review*). In their studies, (*redacted for blind review*) have tested the rational reading of the Objection. They focused on the proposition that there exists a widely shared intuition that at least some consequentialist demands are unreasonably extreme: that consequentialism requires people to do what they don’t have decisive reason to do. Based on the philosophical literature discussing the Objection, the main expectations were that (a) *Hypothesis 1*: increasing demands would be associated with higher levels of rejection of the consequentialist course of action and (b) *Hypothesis 2*: at least in some cases the consequentialist course of action would be perceived as overly demanding by most if not all participants. They found, however, that while *Hypothesis 1* is confirmed, *Hypothesis 2* was not clearly supported by their results. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See (*redacted for blind review*) for details. The scenarios to be used are of two kinds. First, there are fictitious scenarios in which participants are asked to make a choice between a consequentialist option and a non-consequentialist (non-moral) one. An example is a choice between pursuing a career as a civil engineer in one’s home country (developed, rich, Western state) or taking up an invitation to build orphanages in Africa for little or no payment. Second, there are real-life scenarios using, e.g., dictator games. For example, participants can be asked to divide a possible lottery win of € 100 between themselves and a UNICEF program buying measles vaccines for children in the developing world, with rewards actually paid out to a randomly selected participant. The two kinds of scenarios supplement each other since the “as-if”-character of imaginary scenarios may not elicit the same kind of responses as real-life situations (Parkinson & Manstead 1993) and because of possible response tendencies towards socially desirable answers (Krosnick 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See previous footnote for details. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. [Acknowledgements] [↑](#footnote-ref-33)