I am grateful to the critics for the attention they have given to Harman’s and my book, and I thank them for their kind words. I regret that, for lack of space, I can respond to only a few of the points they make.

1. Simon Blackburn objects to my construing the idea of moral objectivity as follows: it is possible to find out that some moral sentences are true. He says that he—an expressivist—believes that too. Thus he believes it possible to find out that Bill acted wickedly. (“It wasn’t an accident; he deliberately placed the spider in Mary’s bed for mischief.”) So Blackburn counts as in favor of moral objectivity according to my construal of that idea. Where, then, is the interest in or importance of the idea?

Two paragraphs down, however, he says: “Of course, as an expressivist, I have a certain gloss on these cases: I hold that the finding out is done from within a moral framework, and to have a moral framework is fundamentally to have a set of practical attitudes....” What are we to make of that? Blackburn, I am sure, would grant that Smith and Jones might have different moral frameworks. (They might, after all, have different practical attitudes.) Does Blackburn think it possible that Smith has found out from within his moral framework that Bill acted wickedly and that Jones has found out from within his that Bill did not? It is hard to see how he could deny this possibility. But then if (as he suggests) finding out from within a moral framework counts as finding out, the following can both be true:

(1) Smith found out that Bill acted wickedly

and

(2) Jones found out that Bill did not act wickedly.

That seems to me obviously false. Not false because I use the English expression “find out” in some quirky way, which I owe the reader an explanation of; false, rather, because the English expression “find out” is factive. It cannot be that Smith found out that Bill was born in Greece and that Jones...
found out that he was not: if Smith found out that Bill was born in Greece, then Bill was born in Greece, and a fortiori Jones did not find out that he was not. So also: if (1) is true, then Bill did act wickedly, and (2) is false. Indeed, if (1) is true, then Bill acted wickedly whatever Jones’s practical attitudes may be.

So Blackburn’s agreement with the thesis that it is possible to find out that a moral sentence is true should be mistrusted: the thesis is stronger than he says, and is not really consistent with his expressivist meta-ethic.

2. Chapter 6 was concerned with an epistemological argument for moral skepticism whose second premise says: (ii) there is no moral sentence whose truth would explain the truth of any factual sentence. As I said in my Precis, some people have argued that (ii) is false. They did so by supplying counterexamples of several kinds. I discussed cases of each kind and rejected them. Sturgeon says: “I do not believe that Thomson makes a plausible case for rejecting any of the sorts of moral explanation that she considers.”

In section (1) of his comments, Sturgeon invites us to imagine a situation in which he would conclude

(a) Injustice caused revolution R.

He says that someone who joins Thomson in rejecting (a) on the ground that moral facts are epiphenomenal, but who has the same evidence and background moral beliefs as Sturgeon’s, would instead conclude

(b) Some nonmoral properties on which injustice supervenes caused revolution R.

But the person who thinks that moral facts are epiphenomenal is going to think that the fact that injustice supervenes on those nonmoral properties (whatever they may be) played no role in their causing revolution R, so what exactly does Sturgeon think he gains by this move from (a) to (b)?

Since he says that (b) is itself a moral sentence—since it entails that the situation causing the revolution was unjust—one possibility is this. “X caused Y” would, no doubt, explain “Y occurred.” So here we have a moral sentence (b) which would explain the nonmoral sentence

(c) Revolution R occurred.

So here we have a counterexample to premise (ii).

What does emerge here is that (ii) does not satisfactorily express what friends of the epistemological argument have in mind. If any compound sentence which has a moral conjunct is itself a moral sentence, and if also it
explains everything any of its conjuncts explains, then there are any number of even simpler countercases to (ii). Consider

(d) Mary’s moving her arm caused your glass to break, and Booth acted wrongly in shooting Lincoln.

If (d) counts as a moral sentence, and if also it explains everything its first conjunct explains, then (d) explains

(e) Your glass broke,

and we have yet another countercase to (ii).

It is a good (if not exactly novel) question how the thought underlying (ii) is to be reexpressed so as to have it not be susceptible of trivial countercases such as that one. I took the terms of the epistemological argument from its friends, neat, and did not discuss this difficulty.

It remains the case that there is a thought underlying (ii). I can express it here only very roughly as the thought that the moral nowhere explains the nonmoral. Or, alternatively: the moral is everywhere epiphenomenal relative to the nonmoral. I think we have an intuitive grasp of what that thought is, enough to know that the pair (d) and (e) does not supply a countercase to it. What of the pair (b) and (c)? (b) says only that certain nonmoral properties on which injustice supervenes caused revolution R, and does not itself say that the supervening injustice played a role in their causing R; so this pair too does not supply a countercase to the thought underlying (ii).

What I argued in the book is that none of the kinds of cases that have appeared in the literature supply countercases to that thought.

Before turning to my argument, I need to say something more about (a). Sturgeon says I reject (a). But what do people who say the likes of (a) mean by it? I believe that what historians mean when they say about a particular revolution that injustice caused it is that features of the society on which injustice supervenes caused it. Thus they mean (b) by (a). And I do not reject (b). I also do not object to their expressing their thought that (b) is true by asserting the simpler (a).1

What I do object to is drawing from their saying (a), or from (b), or just supposing warranted, the conclusion that the fact that injustice supervened on

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1 Sturgeon says it is “near-truistic” that “other things equal, justice stabilizes a society whereas injustice destabilizes it.” I believe that what political theorists mean when they say this is that other things equal, the features of a society on which justice supervenes stabilize it, whereas the features of a society on which injustice supervenes destabilize it. I have no objection to that, so I do not reject what they mean by what they say.

Similarly for grocers. As I said, one should be suspicious of views that would shock one’s grocer. But I do not at all recommend taking what they say to supply answers to meta-ethical questions, and that is because what they mean by what they say does not do so.
the relevant features played a role in their causing the revolution. That is quite another matter.

To turn now to my argument. In section (3), Sturgeon accuses me of arguing for the epiphenomenality of the moral in a manner that would equally well yield the epiphenomenality of all supervenient facts, including the mental. Since that is highly implausible, this is a serious accusation.

How did I argue for the epiphenomenality of the moral? I drew attention to the following case. Suppose Donald shouted “Boo!” at a speaker in mid-speech; let

\[
\text{MID-SPEECH} = \text{the fact that Donald's shouting “Boo!” was his shouting “Boo!” at a speaker in mid-speech.}
\]

Suppose that Donald’s shouting “Boo!” then caused there to be a “Boo!” sound on the tape recording of the speech; let

\[
\text{TAPE} = \text{the fact that there is a “Boo!” sound on the tape recording of the speech.}
\]

By hypothesis, MID-SPEECH explains TAPE. We can certainly suppose that Donald’s shouting “Boo!” was rude, and indeed, that what I will call RUDE—

\[
\text{RUDE} = \text{the fact that Donald’s shouting “Boo!” was rude—}
\]

supervenes on MID-SPEECH. But RUDE does not explains TAPE. The fact that the shout was rude surely played no role at all in bringing about that there is a “Boo!” sound on the tape; so the fact that the shout was rude is epiphenomenal relative to the explanandum that there is a “Boo!” sound on the tape.

So far so good. But now: why did I draw attention to this case? Sturgeon implies that I did so in order to argue that moral facts are epiphenomenal as follows. Moral facts supervene on nonmoral base facts (as RUDE supervenes on MID-SPEECH). Given that a nonmoral base fact explains a nonmoral explanandum (as MID-SPEECH explains TAPE), it follows that the moral fact that supervenes on the nonmoral base fact is epiphenomenal relative to the nonmoral explanandum (as RUDE is epiphenomenal relative to TAPE). More briefly put: if moral F supervenes on nonmoral X, then if X explains nonmoral E, it follows that F is epiphenomenal relative to E. (Railton too attributes this argument to me.)

Sturgeon then says, “[i]t can be argued in just this way, for example, that if the mental supervenes on the physical, then mental facts are epiphenomenal.” Thus if mental F supervenes on physical X, then if X explains physical E, it follows that F is epiphenomenal relative to E. So accepting my argu-
ment commits me, and anyone who joins me, to the conclusion that mental facts too are epiphenomenal.

But that was not my argument. What I wished to make clear is that some supervenient facts $F$ do not explain what their base facts explain. Thus: from the fact that $F$ supervenes on $X$, and $X$ explains $E$, it does not follow that $F$ does explain $E$. The case of Donald makes this abundantly clear, since RUDE does not explain TAPE.

I then said that there is a difficulty here. Some supervenient facts are epiphenomenal relative to some explananda which are explained by their base facts. For example, RUDE is epiphenomenal relative to TAPE which is explained by MID-SPEECH. Others, we are strongly inclined to think are not. For example, just about all philosophers of mind nowadays hold that the mental supervenes on the physical, and most of them think it had better turn out that at least some mental facts explain some of the physical facts explained by the mental facts’ physical base facts. For example, we are strongly inclined to think that a man’s having a toothache explains his wincing, even though that explanandum is also explained by the physical facts about his brain on which his having a toothache supervenes. What makes the difference? Nobody has a convincing story to tell. I therefore said that—with the exception of one kind of case (which I turn to shortly)—we have simply to go case by case, asking ourselves whether a given case does or does not look intuitively like that of Donald. And I said about a case of Railton’s, in which a moral fact is said to explain a person’s having a certain attitude, that I can see no good reason to think that it differs from the case of Donald.2

Sturgeon takes me to task for not supplying an account of the relevant difference between the epiphenomenal and non-epiphenomenal supervenient. He says that his intuitions differ from mine, so if I can offer no more than intuition in support of my conclusion about the moral, my argument fails.

What Sturgeon has not noticed is that he too needs an account of the difference between the epiphenomenal and non-epiphenomenal supervenient. I need an account according to which the moral goes along with Donald on the epiphenomenality side, and the mental goes on the non-epiphenomenality side. Sturgeon needs an account according to which Donald is on the epiphenomenality side, and the moral goes along with the mental on the non-epiphenomenality side.

Or so I think, since I take it to be a datum that Donald is on the epiphenomenality side. What does Sturgeon think? His remarks about Donald are baffling. He begins as follows: “It strikes me as important that whether this

2 In Railton’s case, the discounting of a person’s interests explains his feeling discontented, not because the person believes the discounting is unjust—though it is unjust—but just off its own bat. Railton says: here the injustice of the discounting explains the discontent. I said I can see no better reason to think this than there is to think that the rudeness of Donald’s shout explains the sound on the tape.
example even appears to illustrate any kind of epiphenomenality depends on what question we ask. If we were wondering whether rudeness could ever produce a sound on a tape, this example would seem a convincing argument that it could have such an effect, rather than an argument that it could not have it.” What can he mean? He takes the case of Donald to be a convincing argument for

(f) Rudeness can produce a sound on a tape.

But then he had better mean by (f) no more than that instances of rudeness can produce sounds on a tape, for that is all that is shown by the case of Donald. But then (f) is compatible with rudeness' being everywhere epiphenomenal. So the point of the remark I quoted escapes me.

Sturgeon goes on to say he agrees that it is “tempting” to say that in the case of Donald, “the supervening moral fact makes no physical difference,” thus that RUDE does not explain TAPE. But he says: “I do not believe that this temptation can help her establish that moral facts are epiphenomenal.” He then straightway turns from Donald to the mental. (“It can be argued in just this way, for example, that if the mental supervenes on the physical, then mental facts are epiphenomenal.”) But what we need to know about is Donald. Are we to resist the temptation, and declare that RUDE does explain TAPE? Or are were to yield to the temptation, and declare that RUDE does not explain TAPE? He doesn’t say. I hardly need to repeat that I think we had better yield to the temptation; and if so, Sturgeon too needs an account of the difference between the epiphenomenal and non-epiphenomenal supervenient.3

I turn now to the kind of case about which I said that we do not need to appeal to intuitive comparisons with the case of Donald. The kind I have in mind is important to Sturgeon: he had argued in his earlier work that in those cases, a certain moral fact explains the nonmoral fact that consists in a person's believing that the moral fact exists. Here is an example. Let

3 Perhaps Sturgeon thought he had one? He had in his earlier work argued that a moral fact might be non-epiphenomenal relative to a certain nonmoral fact by appeal to certain counterfactuals; perhaps he thought that the availability of such counterfactuals quite generally marks the non-epiphenomenal off from the epiphenomenal? That won’t do, however, since analogous counterfactuals are available in the case of Donald. (Indeed, it was precisely to show that Sturgeon’s argument from counterfactuals fails that I drew attention to Donald in the first place.)

Railton suggests in his comments that we might appeal to the availability of theories here: thus that the availability of psychological, sociological, and biological theories might be said to mark the psychological, sociological, and biological as non-epiphenomenal. And he asks why there shouldn’t be moral theory too, which does the same for the moral. We need to see the details, though, in order to assess this suggestion. And a crucial detail is this: how is it to turn out that RUDE does not explain TAPE, whereas a man’s having a toothache, for example, does explain his wincing? My own view is that theories—or anyway, sophisticated theories—are neither needed nor helpful when it comes to details like this one. Unlike Railton, I think that the question here is not an empirical one.
WORD = the fact that Alice’s giving Bert a banana was her keeping her word when it was costly to her to do so and she could have got away without doing so.

Suppose that WORD made it the case that Alice’s giving Bert a banana was just; let

JUST = the fact that Alice’s giving Bert a banana was just.

(We can suppose that JUST supervenes on WORD.) Suppose also that Charles learned about WORD and for that reason, believes that Alice’s giving Bert a banana was just—that is, he believes that JUST exists; let

BELIEF = the fact that Charles believes that JUST exists.

WORD was Charles’s reason for believing that JUST exists; on any view, therefore, WORD explains BELIEF. Sturgeon argued that JUST also explains BELIEF. So, Sturgeon said, here a (moral) fact JUST explains the (nonmoral) fact BELIEF.

Now I argued in the book that Sturgeon’s argument for the conclusion that JUST explains BELIEF does not succeed. (See the first paragraph of footnote 3 above.) But I did more than merely reject Sturgeon’s argument for that conclusion; I argued that JUST does not explain BELIEF. I did so by appeal to a quite general principle, namely: “If a person believes that there is such a fact as F because he takes the fact X to be reason for believing that there is such a fact as F, then F explains the person’s belief only if F explains X.” If that principle is right, then JUST explains BELIEF only if JUST explains WORD, which was Charles’s reason for believing that JUST exists. But JUST patently does not explain WORD. It is rather WORD that explains JUST.

Sturgeon replies that my principle “seems too restrictive”. If we accept it, “we face very odd consequences”. How so? He says: “there are some nonmoral explanations of moral beliefs that clearly conflict with any explanation appealing to the truth of the belief—but others that do not.” He draws attention to two candidate explanations of the New England anti-slavery movement of the 1830’s. (i) “the abolitionists were largely a displaced elite expressing resentment at industrialists who had supplanted them . . . .” (ii) the abolitionists “noticed the very features we think made slavery wrong, and believed it wrong for those reasons.” And he says: if we think (i) is true, we will think that the anti-slavery movement was not “a response to the evil of slavery”, whereas if we think (ii) is true, we will think that it was. And he says: “Thomson will have to deny this contrast, however. On her view, these two nonmoral stories both conflict equally with the suggestion that aboli-
Abolitionism was a response to the evil of slavery, and so equally undermine that explanation. I find this implication of her view most implausible."

Many historians say

(A) Abolitionism was a response to the evil of slavery.

I believe that what they mean is:

(B) The abolitionists opposed slavery because they noticed the features that made slavery wrong—not just the features we think made slavery wrong, but the features that did make it wrong—and believed it wrong for those reasons.

On this interpretation of (A), it conflicts with (i) and not with (ii), on my view as on anyone else’s. I add that, as I said earlier about historians who say (a), meaning (b) by it, I have no objection to historians’ saying (A), meaning (B) by it.

A philosopher with a meta-ethical axe to grind might say (A) meaning something stronger by it, namely

(C) The abolitionists opposed slavery not just because they noticed the features that made slavery wrong and believed it wrong for those reasons, but also because it was wrong,

which gives the wrongness itself a role in generating the opposition. For my part, I see no reason to accept (C). But to reject (C) is not to reject what historians mean by (A), and is not to undermine anything that historical findings could lend weight to. I therefore fail to see the oddity or implausibility that Sturgeon says my principle commits me to.