The Bad and the Good About the Phenomenal Stance

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Abstract

Folk psychology's usefulness extends beyond its role in explaining and predicting behavior, i.e., beyond the intentional stance. In this paper, I critically examine the concept of phenomenal stance. According to this idea, attributions of phenomenal mental states impact laypeople's perception of moral patiency. The more phenomenal states we ascribe to others, the more we care about their well-being. The perception of moral patients—those affected by moral actions—is hypothesized to diverge from the perception of moral agents, those who perform moral actions. Despite its appeal, especially considering its exploration of the established relationship between folk psychology and moral cognition, the idea of the phenomenal stance faces significant challenges. It relies on laypeople recognizing the phenomenality of experience, yet experimental philosophy of consciousness suggests that there is no folk concept of phenomenal consciousness. Moreover, proponents of the phenomenal stance often conflate phenomenal states with emotional states despite the existence of both non-emotional conscious states and, arguably, non-conscious emotional states. Additionally, attributions of conscious mental states impact the perception of both moral agency and patiency. I report on experimental results indicating that some of these attributions lower the perceived moral patiency. Besides providing reasons to reject the idea of the phenomenal stance, I argue that the perception of moral patiency is guided by attributions of affective states (affects, emotions, moods). I call such attributions the affective stance and explore this concept's relationship with empathy and other psychological concepts.

Keywords: folk psychology; phenomenal stance; intentional stance; affective stance

Public Significance Statement

This study examines the concept of the phenomenal stance, linking moral concern to the attribution of conscious mental states. The findings challenge the idea that the qualitative aspect of consciousness underpins moral perceptions. Instead, the paper introduces the concept of the affective stance, where attributions of emotional states guide moral concern. This perspective

highlights the role of emotions in moral cognition, offering insights into how we perceive and care about others.

The Bad and the Good About the Phenomenal Stance

I am concerned about the well-being of others like me—members of various societal groups I belong to. My concern is a result of multiple cultural and biological processes. But what do I identify in an object that makes me concerned about it? According to one answer, the concern is guided by recognizing others as bearers of experiential states. We take the phenomenal stance (PS), attribute phenomenal states to other agents, and thus perceive them as moral patients (Robbins & Jack, 2006).

Linking consciousness with morality is common in ethics, where being morally responsible is considered dependent on having consciousness and free will (Levy, 2014a, 2014b). Specifically, sentience, the capacity to feel pain, suffering, and pleasure, has been commonly indicated as necessary for having moral status (Singer, 1975), as is a more general capacity to have experiences and mental faculties (Regan, 2004). The moral-grounding role of consciousness is sometimes traced back to the perceived intrinsic value of phenomenal states (Shepherd, 2018).

The idea of PS develops conceptual foundations of folk psychology research, extending Dennett's (1987) preeminent account of stances. Stances are quick, making-sense strategies of explaining what happens with objects due to their physical constitution (the physical stance), function (the design stance), and how objects behave by attributing beliefs, desires, and other mental states to them (the intentional stance). Folk psychology research has long been focused on the intentional stance (e.g., Stich, 1983; Wellman et al., 2001). Note that while intentionality (directedness) was traditionally viewed as a mark of mental states and consciousness in philosophy, Dennett's account was instrumental, without presupposing that attributed states must reflect the agent's experiences. This fits nicely in his overall view about consciousness (Dennett, 1991) but also helps to understand why the field of folk psychology research has focused on predicting behavior: the phenomenological roots of the idea of intentionality have been largely absent from the debate. Today we study folk attributions of a wide range of different types of mental states and capacities in diverse contexts (e.g., Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Bensalah et al., 2016; Carruthers, 2016; Denny et al.,

2012; Fan et al., 2011; Frith & Frith, 2012; Happé et al., 2017; Krall et al., 2016; Krupenye & Call, 2019; Molenberghs et al., 2016; Peters, 2019; Schurz et al., 2014). It is today clear that folk psychology serves more than predicting behavior (Spaulding, 2018, 2019; Waytz et al., 2010). Thus, the concept of intentional stance is not sufficient to describe folk psychology.

The phenomenal stance account belongs to a strain of research investigating the impact of folk psychology on moral cognition (Bzdok et al., 2015; Knobe, 2005). More specifically, the concept of PS corresponds to the duality of moral cognition. We discern moral agents (those that act morally) from patients (those that are morally acted upon), and this discrimination is mainly divergent: the more we perceive someone as a moral agent, the less likely we are to perceive it as a moral patient (Gray & Wegner, 2009). Whereas the intentional stance is a gateway to the perception of moral agency (Robbins & Jack, 2006; Jack & Robbins, 2012), adopting PS is said to guide our perception of moral patiency[1].

The phenomenal stance, together with the physical and intentional stances, is posited to elucidate intuitions underpinning the explanatory gap (Robbins & Jack, 2006, p. 72–79), as well as utilitarian and deontological ethical theories, among other philosophical issues. These intuitions, often conflicting, are translated into differences in types of cognition and their corresponding neural networks (Friedman & Jack, 2018). Adopting PS is believed to activate the default-mode network while inhibiting the task-positive network, while adopting the physical stance is thought to have the opposite effect. The intentional stance, on the other hand, is proposed to depend on the activation of both brain networks (see also Jack, 2014; Jack et al., 2013;).

[1] Dennett already pursued this intuition in his remarks on the *personal stance* (1981, p. 240–241), a moral perspective toward agents. However, this early notion seems too narrow, as according to personal stance, to morally perceive others, we first need to recognize them with the intentional stance. There have been some efforts to refine Dennett's framework that did not extend to moral thinking (e.g., Foxall, 1999; Lee & Dewhurst, 2021; Olin, 2020). Also, Arvan's (2021) *normative stance* explores our tendency to perceive the world through various normative lenses. As this concept refers to all kinds of normative thinking, it is less helpful in responding to a more specific issue such as the one I pursue in this paper: what mental states and capacities we attribute to others that make us concerned about their wellbeing. Note that this issue does not presuppose that concern for others cannot also arise from other factors, like situational context or even arbitrary decisions.

The concept of PS is appealing, as it neatly connects three strands of philosophical and scientific research: folk psychology, consciousness, and moral cognition. Selecting phenomenality as *the* aspect of consciousness that guides ordinary conscious mental state attributions is just as alluring. This aspect is often viewed as especially self-evident (Chalmers, 2018; Koch, 2019; Goff, 2017; Schwitzgebel, 2016). The obviousness of phenomenality has profound implications for the eliminativists vs. realists debate, as it is this obviousness that arguably allows us to begin discussing phenomenal consciousness in the first place (Irvine & Sprevak, 2020; Mandik, 2016; Ozdemir, 2022; Owesen, 2023). If phenomenality mistakenly appears obvious to realists, then we are left with solely technical, closed-loop language for theorizing about phenomenal consciousness. In consequence, there might be nothing about consciousness that is outside of the scope of empirical science, i.e., no real hard problem of consciousness after all: "Without a clear, tolerably accurate description of what conscious experience is, we cannot begin to address that question or even evaluate whether doing so would be difficult" (Rosenthal, 2019, p. 202).

Contrary to the proponents of obviousness, empirical evidence has recently started to indicate that laypeople are largely oblivious to the phenomenality of mental states. I will review these findings in the following section. Given how they begin to pile up, these findings are a compelling justification for rejecting the idea of PS, as far as we understand it as the stance's name suggests, as an attribution of mental states guided by their perceived phenomenality. I am also skeptical whether we can save the assumption underlying the PS proposal, namely that there is a strong link between folk views about consciousness and moral perception. In the remaining sections, I argue against the severity of this link. While discussing PS, much focus is put on emotional states, and it can be argued that they serve poorly as definitive, or canonical, examples of conscious mental states. Moreover, attributions of conscious states do not always heighten perceptions of moral patiency. They play a role in the perception of moral agency. This challenges the assumed divergence between PS and the intentional stance within the PS framework. In the Affective Stance section, I show how we can save the link between folk psychology stances and the perception of moral

patiency. What impacts lay perceptions of moral patiency is the affective stance, i.e., attributions of emotional states. This stance is a tool for quick facilitation of prosocial behavior. At the end of the paper, I discuss how the affective stance is closely related, but not reducible, to empathy or compassion.

Laypeople Fail to Notice the Phenomenality of Experience

The idea of PS does not rely on the ability to recognize the phenomenality of conscious experience solely due to its name, the "phenomenal" stance. This recognition is a fundamental part of the framework. Adopting PS is conditional on being able to notice the phenomenality of experience: "To adopt the phenomenal stance toward *X* is to understand *X* as a 'phenomenal system,' that is, to regard *X* as a locus of phenomenal experience" (Robbins and Jack, 2006, p. 69). What is needed, then, to recognize a phenomenal system, to notice that it has phenomenal consciousness? Recognizing implies the ability to conceptually distinguish something from other things, even if just in a limited, provisional way. Three options seem plausible: (1) one needs the concept of phenomenal consciousness, (2) one needs a concept of phenomenal consciousness that is different from the philosophical one, or (3) to attribute a given phenomenal state, one needs a relevant phenomenal concept[2]. Neither of the three is promising for the idea of PS.

Now, if anyone has the concept of phenomenal consciousness, it's surely scholars. Even eliminativists arguably demonstrate its possession when they discuss phenomenal consciousness. The lexicon of folk psychology is filled with various "subjective" "feelings," "experiences," and "sensations." When our neighbor hears us say, "I feel happy today," she clearly comprehends that the happiness is mine and that this specific happiness is felt by me alone. At first glance, it is plausible that laypeople also possess this concept, even if only tacitly. The (2) option also might hold some appeal. It may be unreasonable to put philosophical subtlety into ordinary concepts. Peressini argues that laypeople "have a concept of some sense of qualia or 'phenomenality'" (2014, p. 22), a concept that only partially reflects the philosophical one:

[2] For a similar line of thought, see Chalmers (2020).

> Call it “p-qualia” (for “physical” or “pholk”), and it has some of the properties of m-qualia ['classic' qualia]: it is qualitative in that it concerns how the experience “actually appears/feels” to the subject, it is private/perspectival, and it is practically ineffable. But p-qualia are still ultimately tied to the physical. Hence, p-qualia are not the sort that “hard problem” arguments need to get off the ground (2014, p. 888).

If this is indeed the case, and let's assume for a moment that it is, then Peressini's view indicates that option (2) is perfectly viable, as adopting PS does not rest on making any metaphysical claims regarding phenomenality.

The (3) option also seems compatible with PS, at least if we move past the issue of learning to use non-physical (phenomenal) concepts to describe physical entities such as agents perceived in the environment. Take a typical scholarly example of a phenomenal state: feeling pain. If I have the phenomenal concept of feeling pain, I can exercise PS to attribute the phenomenal state of feeling pain. Phenomenal concepts are thought to arise from acquaintance with specific experiences. To have a phenomenal concept of feeling pain, one must have felt pain before and perhaps introspected on this pain while undergoing it (Sundström, 2011). Robbins and Jack express a similar sentiment about PS: "(…) if you don't know what it's like to feel sad, you can't understand what it is to feel sad. And if you can't understand what it is to feel sad, you can't regard something as feeling sad – at least, not in the full-blooded way that the phenomenal stance requires" (p. 70). If laypeople possess phenomenal concepts, they likely align with their most frequent experiences. States such as feeling pain and seeing a color seem familiar enough; scholars also often point to them as examples of phenomenal states.

The problem with option (1) is that it heavily relies on impressions, and this is a rather shortsighted strategy for establishing folk intuitions. Scholars are prone to cognitive biases, such as framing and order effects, and the actor-observer bias (Schwitzgebel & Cushman, 2012, 2015; Tobia et al., 2013). Philosophers' linguistic intuitions are influenced by their expertise in different areas of linguistics (Machery, 2012). And most compellingly, it has been shown that people, including

philosophers, are prone to salience bias, i.e., their intuitive inferences are often based on the word's stereotypical, dominant meaning rather than the less salient but contextually implied meaning (Fischer & Engelhardt, 2019). This is especially relevant in unusual or "esoteric" cases often involved in philosophical thought experiments and argumentation. For instance, the inappropriate inferences from usages of appearance- and perception-related verbs have been shown to impact the problem of perception, i.e., argumentations for there being mind-dependent objects of perception (Fischer & Engelhardt, 2016, 2020; Fischer, Engelhardt, Horvath, et al., 2021; Fischer, Engelhardt, and Sytsma, 2021). The study by Fischer and Sytsma (2021) has, on the other hand, demonstrated the salience bias in inferences involving philosophical zombies, our imaginary clones lacking phenomenal consciousness. Given these findings, it becomes increasingly clear that claims about the obviousness of philosophical concepts or properties require more than intuitive judgments. Whether laypeople possess the concept in question is an empirical matter. Thankfully, there is a sizeable body of work regarding this topic, and while some early results suggested that laypeople differentiate between attributing phenomenal and other mental states (Knobe & Prinz, 2008), most research indicates they do not possess a singular concept of phenomenal consciousness[3]. Adding to the already mentioned work on the salience bias, laypeople tend not to attribute perceptual and pain states as one would expect, provided one recognizes that both kinds exhibit phenomenal qualities (Cova et al., 2021; Sytsma, 2012, 2014a; Sytsma & Machery, 2010, 2012; Sytsma & Ozdemir, 2019; Reuter, 2024; Reuter & Sytsma, 2020). Also, linguistic investigations into ordinary expressions like "experience" suggest that the technical view concerning phenomenality-related language is correct (Byrne, 2004; Janzen, 2011; Lewis, 1995; Owesen, 2023). Ordinary language appears to lack any meaning adjacent to phenomenal consciousness (Fischer & Engelhardt, 2020; Sytsma & Fischer, 2023; Wierzbicka, 2010, 2019).

Notice that these results speak just as much against the (3) option, one involving phenomenal concepts. If it is not the recognition of phenomenality that guides attributions of

[3] For criticism of the methodology behind experimental philosophy of consciousness see Wyrwa (2022).

feeling/experiencing pain and seeing/experiencing red, ubiquitous examples of phenomenal states discussed in philosophy, then either laypeople lack relevant phenomenal concepts, or they do not impact the attribution process. And that such recognition guides the attribution of conscious mental states was the crux of PS's proposal. Now, it may be that the possession of phenomenal concepts is inaccessible to the empirical scrutiny of mental state attributions studies and linguistic investigations, but such a claim does not help the PS account's proponents. After all, the phenomenal stance is supposed to *be* the attribution of mental states.

To those who possess the concept of phenomenal consciousness, imagining that the ordinary utterance "I know what it is like to love someone" refers to the phenomenality of love is strikingly easy. It is precisely this easiness that guides philosophers to claim that the ordinary meaning behind phrases like 'what it is like' relates to phenomenal consciousness (e.g., Stoljar, 2016). But one can describe one's mental states without referring to their phenomenality. Noticing that mental states are subjective does not entail noticing their phenomenality (Levine, 2001). And even grasping that feeling joyful is subjectively experienced with an emotional coloration is not the same as recognizing that this coloration is phenomenal in nature. One can utter "I feel joyful" and be disposed to differentiate their feeling of joy from feelings of sadness or anger but lack a deliberate recognition that this joyful feeling comprises qualitative mental properties.

But what about the (2) option? Peressini's view that laypeople possess "p-qualia" concept is based on his study. However, as argued by Sytsma (2014b, p. 644) and Wyrwa (2022, p. 48–49), this study involved instructing participants about a category of "experiencers." Its description explicitly stated that several electromechanical objects do not fall into this category[4]. This has likely tampered with participants' initial intuitions regarding what kind of agent experiences mental states, which

[4] "As we all know, each of us as conscious human beings have an 'inner life.' We are aware of things going on around us and inside our minds. In other words, there is something it is like to be each of us at any given moment: the sum total of what we are sensing, thinking, feeling, etc. We are experiencers. On the other hand, things like thermostats, burglar alarms, and bread machines do not have an inner life: there is not anything it is like to be these objects, despite the fact that they can monitor conditions around them and make appropriate things happen at appropriate times. They are not experiencers" (Peressini, 2014, p. 870–871).

might explain why he found that laypeople are unlikely to view intelligent robots as experiencers[5]. This makes the outcomes of Peressini's empirical study doubtful. Moreover, even if we are to accept the design of this study, the question arises as to whether the results truly support Peressini's interpretation, i.e., whether the interpretation is psychometrically valid. According to Peressini, the ordinary concept of p-qualia involves viewing experience as practically ineffable (2014, p. 884). This conclusion is drawn from participant responses to the question, "Can we be sure that you see red the way another person does?" But a negative response to this question could be interpreted in multiple ways, e.g., it could be a result of believing there might be biological differences in visual systems between people or of being uncertain as to whether light conditions are precisely the same for us as they are for another person who sees the same red object. Furthermore, Peressini claims that p-qualia involve a qualitative, "something it is like" aspect because participants tended to deny that a completely color-blind person with an implant encoding color blue as "1" in her visual field sees blue (2014, p. 888). However, it's doubtful whether we can reasonably assume that an average person possesses a sufficient understanding of vision to interpret the phrase "implant encoding a color" in a way that is relevant to the cognitive or phenomenal change associated with seeing or not seeing a color. Also, Peressini's interpretation of the responses to this single question is at odds with the already mentioned numerous results indicating the lack of phenomenal-related reading to appearance verbs like 'seeing' (e.g., Cova et al., 2021; Sytsma & Machery, 2010, 2012; Fischer & Engelhardt, 2020).

Finally, p-qualia are supposed to be tied to the physical—Peressini's participants (1) accepted the possibility of there being a creature without subjective experiences (like feeling) but with objective experiences (like pressure, light frequency, etc.) instead, and accepted that such a creature would be an experiencer, (2) they denied such possibility and the experiencerhood to a robot equipped with respective objective senses, and (3) denied the possibility of there being philosophical

[5] Peressini (2014), links this with on average positive responses to the question "Is a person with 'linguistic' senses an experiencer?"

zombies, regardless of how the zombiehood would be achieved, be it due to the medical procedure of removing inner experiences without affecting the brain or there being a physically and behaviorally identical twin. On the empirical side, this connection between phenomenality and embodiment is consistent with some experimental results pointing to the role of the perceived body type on attributions of pain experiences (Sytsma, 2012) but not with others (Buckwalter & Phelan, 2014). But then, one does not have to view the phenomenality as not tied to the body, to nevertheless view it as the property of mental states. Results of the recent PhilPapers Survey (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023), however, show that most philosophers who accept the hard problem of consciousness deny the possibility and the conceivability of philosophical zombies. Moreover, those that explicitly adhere to physicalism are pretty much split on the hard problem[6]. The metaphysical nature of phenomenality seems more like a philosophical controversy rather than an element of phenomenal realism's credo. Regardless, then, of whether or not laypeople assume such an embodiment claim regarding phenomenality, it alone tells us little about whether or not this phenomenality is "standard" or if there actually is any ordinary concept of phenomenality.

To sum up, Peressini's proposal is unconvincing both in terms of the study design and his take on its implications. But there is also a more general issue with the idea that there is an ordinary concept of phenomenality that differs from the philosophical one. What exactly are we claiming when we say there is a philosophical concept ‘P’ and an ordinary concept ‘O’ that, while not identical, is ‘P-like’? The key question is whether the differences between ‘P’ and ‘O’ are distinguishable in practical terms. If the differences are irrelevant for the application of ‘P’ in the same situations as ‘O’, then by all practical means, ‘O’ is ‘P’. I doubt we can point to any such property of phenomenality that is—at the same time—essential for philosophy and which recognition by laypeople has not been contested so far by empirical evidence. And if we take such recognition not to be measurable

[6] The same holds for solely philosophers of mind.

empirically, then we are left begging the question of how any observable ordinary attributions of mental states could be guided by recognizing phenomenality[7].

We could also try to claim some form of indirectness. For example, we may argue that laypeople recognize the value of consciousness, and because the latter stems from consciousness being phenomenal, laypeople indirectly attribute phenomenal states whenever they attribute valuable (from their point of view) mental states. But to defend such indirectness, proponents need to firmly establish the link between phenomenal consciousness and value, and present evidence indicating that laypeople view consciousness as valuable. Arguably, defending such indirectness requires a lot of work. Regardless, such indirectness would count as more of a "value" rather than a "phenomenal" stance.

I provided several reasons to at least question the philosophical intuition that phenomenality is evident for laypeople. This makes the label of "phenomenal stance" dubious, but as further analysis of PS is not dependent on laypeople's recognition of the phenomenality of conscious mental states, I will still rely on the nomenclature of PS's proposal. Regardless of how, instead of "phenomenal," we call the states that are attributed with PS, perhaps the stance does serve the function Jack and Robbins propose.

Emotions as Definitive Examples of Phenomenal States

The tradition of linking consciousness with morality can be broadly understood as follows: more consciousness translates to more moral patiency, or "(…) if a being has phenomenal experience of *any* sort (…), we are morally obliged to take that experience into consideration" (Robbins & Jack,

[7] Consider also how scholars learn about the phenomenality of experience. They analyze the contents and structure of conscious experiences, acquiring concepts related to various aspects of consciousness—unity, intentionality, access, selfhood, temporality, subjectivity, and more. Though these aspects are widely debated (e.g., Bayne & Montague, 2011; Block, 2002; Montague, 2016; Zahavi & Kriegel, 2015), focusing solely on 'what-it-is-like' properties would oversimplify the phenomenon, even if phenomenality is considered the essential feature of consciousness. Distinguishing phenomenal consciousness from other aspects arguably requires a grasp of multiple concepts about mind and consciousness. Unlike having a workable concept of a screwdriver, which one could have without seeing any other manual tools, we are tacitly exposed to all aspects of consciousness, but perhaps we lack insight to differentiate between them in the ongoing stream of conscious mental states. Maybe, then, to determine whether laypeople hold a concept of phenomenality, one needs to establish their grasp of related concepts as well.

2006, p. 70–71). While such a rule does not imply that only PS guides perception of moral patiency, it does follow that positive PS attribution (e.g., "Joe felt happy") heightens and negative PS attribution (e.g., "Joe was not experiencing discomfort") lowers perceived moral patiency. This idea has some prima facie appeal, but I believe it results from oversimplifying consciousness, identifying emotional states as definitive examples of phenomenal states.

Emotions are just one kind of phenomenal state, so at first glance, the idea of PS should not exclusively rely on attributing emotions. Robbins and Jack acknowledge that, listing the following as examples of phenomenal states ascribed with PS: "emotions, moods, pains, visual sensations, etc." (2006, p. 69); "the attribution of properties and states that are associated with experience (e.g., conscious awareness, feelings)" (Jack & Robbins, 2012, p. 383). However, when we look closely, emotions dominate their discourse. Using PS involves some degree of emotional experience: "phenomenal states typically have some hedonic value for the bearer", and being able to act according to this hedonic value is "essential to the phenomenal stance" (Robbins & Jack, 2006, p. 70):

> "(…) phenomenality and morality are tightly linked. Grasping this linkage – not just intellectually, but emotionally (in one's bones, as it were) – is an integral component of the phenomenal stance" (Robbins & Jack, 2006, p. 71).

Robbins and Jack also dissociate between capacities to mindread, which they identify with adopting the intentional stance[8], and capacities to care, i.e., adopting PS (2006, p. 69). Mindreading proficiency is limited on the autism spectrum, but this does not translate to difficulties in caring. They connect the latter with affective empathy, the basic emotional response to the perceived emotions of other agents. This response is limited among individuals with high psychopathic personality traits, who are nevertheless proficient mindreaders.

[8] While the term 'intentional stance' is sometimes distinguished from 'mindreading' or 'theory of mind' (e.g., Marchesi et al., 2019), Robbins and Jack use it interchangeably (2006, p. 61–62). Recently, a consensus has begun to favor 'mentalizing' as the default term for mental state attributions (Quesque et al., 2024).

Emotions are also favored in primary empirical investigations into PS. In their 2012 paper, Jack and Robbins report on four such studies. In the first two, participants read two vignettes about lobsters. The first one described the lobster fishing industry, while the second provided information about lobsters' mental capacities. Participants were asked about their concern for lobsters twice: after reading the first vignette (baseline) and after reading the second one. There were two versions of the second vignette. One was supposed to encourage the usage of PS, while the other was to facilitate the intentional stance. Relevant fragments in former cases were as follows:

> (Study 1) "lobsters have rich and complex emotional lives. They are capable of suffering from depression and anxiety. The neural systems responsible for lobster emotion are similar in important respects to the systems in the human brain" (Jack & Robbins, 2012, p. 387).
>
> (Study 2) "lobsters are much more sensitive creatures than previously believed. For example, it appears that lobsters experience pains, pleasures, emotional feelings, and other sensations in much the same way that people do" (Jack & Robbins, 2012, p. 390).

In the third experiment, participants read about a newly discovered sea creature. Depending on the condition, the creature was depicted either as an adult capable of action or as young and vulnerable. To measure the tendency to attribute phenomenal states, participants were asked whether such a creature could feel happiness or pain when injured, sense how others feel, and whether it was capable of self-reflection (Jack & Robbins, 2012, p. 393). This role of emotions is also visible in additional measurement tools used. In the fourth study, the authors correlated participant responses about the sea creature with the subscale of empathic concern from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980; Jack & Robbins, 2012, p. 395–400), which "assesses 'other-oriented' feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others" (Davis, 1983, p. 114).

I reviewed two key aspects of phenomenal stance: (1) PS involves undergoing emotional experience (the link between PS and affective empathy, as well as the hedonic value associated with phenomenal states), and (2) there was a strong preference to test adopting PS by investigating attributions of emotions. Both aspects limit the scope of PS to (1) attributing only those states that elicit emotional experiences in PS users and to (2) attributing emotions. Such restrictions are dubious, as the emotional states are definitive examples of phenomenal states, nor are all phenomenal states emotionally experienced.

Two misconceptions can incline one to make the above assumptions regarding the conscious quality of emotions and the emotional quality of conscious mental states. According to the first misconception, emotions are always conscious (e.g., Barrett, 2017; LeDoux, 2012, 2014; LeDoux & Hofmann, 2018). Experiencing emotion in this sense equals being in an emotional state because what solely defines emotions is the act of experiencing them. This line of thought often treats emotions as complex mental states requiring advanced cognitive architecture, which is why modern proponents of this conviction, such as LeDoux (2014) and Barrett (2017), deny non-human animals possess emotional states. Yet, to accept such an account is to throw out the baby with the bathwater, as it is inconsistent with the idea that between-species changes in cognitive systems are typically incremental. Phylogenetic and comparative evidence supports the hypothesis that emotional systems predate the evolutionary arrival of humans, while neuroscientific and psychological results indicate that emotional reactions can be triggered unconsciously and remain unconscious (Anderson & Adolphs, 2014; Berridge & Kringelbach, 2015; Berridge & Winkielman, 2003; Kryklywy et al., 2020; Paul et al., 2020).

Occasionally, the claim that emotions are always conscious takes a more cautious form: conscious experience is just one aspect of emotion (Scherer, 2005). We can understand this claim in two ways; neither of them is attractive to proponents of the PS account. If phenomenality is considered the most crucial quality of emotions, then we have the same claim as above in disguise: experiencing emotions is what defines emotional states. Alternatively, if all aspects are equally

relevant, then emotions would be seen as phenomenal states just as much as they are physiological or behavioral states. In that case, the perception of moral patiency might depend less on phenomenal aspects and more on physiological or behavioral ones. Thus, this weaker view of emotions is insufficient to account for PS being the attribution of phenomenal states.

Depicting emotions as always conscious is also problematic because it conflicts with everyday experiences, especially when we introspect on our thoughts and feelings (Schwitzgebel, 2008). Often, we lack access to our emotions or are mistaken about what emotion we undergo: we deny being angry while in a heated debate even though we become aware of how furious we felt afterward. During anxiety-fueled events, such as public speaking, one can often notice that anxiety has faded away sometime during the event, but pinpointing the exact moment when the feeling disappears is nearly impossible. Also, a vital aspect of psychotherapy is making the unconscious emotional processes conscious (Greenberg, 2004; Hayes & Hofmann, 2018). Arguably, there are similar controversies regarding other kinds of mental states. Most notably, there is an ongoing debate about whether perception can be unconscious (Phillips & Block, 2017). These concerns, however, do not make favoring emotions easier. Instead, they make it harder to claim that there are kinds of mental states that are necessarily conscious.

A second way of linking emotional states with consciousness is to argue that all conscious states have an emotional aspect, hedonic value. This is tautologically true for conscious emotions, but let's consider perception. If I'm thirsty, then noticing a bottle of water in front of me may have some hedonic value: I may want to drink it or just be happy about seeing it. But if I am not thirsty, there is no connection between my current emotional state and the bottle in front of me. I underwent a conscious experience of seeing this bottle in both cases, and I would attribute such an experience to other people looking at my desk. Yet, according to how PS is thought of, I should be able to attribute the phenomenal state of seeing a bottle to an agent only if I recognize that this agent is in a state of an affective evaluation of this bottle.

Also, consider cases of emotional numbing, like the decreased sensitivity to experiencing pleasure. Anhedonia has been observed in many disorders, including dementia, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, Parkinson's disease, and depression (Ritsner, 2014). If all conscious states have hedonic value, a severely anhedonic person should lack or have impaired consciousness, including visual consciousness. A rather absurd consequence would be to deny that anhedonic patients can have a phenomenal state of seeing a bottle.

Even if overall ongoing cognition always comprises some emotional response or appraisal (e.g., Carvalho & Damasio, 2021), or a feeling tone (as in the Buddhist idea of vedanā, Batchelor, 2018), it does not follow that such emotional response relates to each aspect of cognition. My seeing of a bottle may not be impacted by emotional processing currently affecting other aspects of my cognition. I may be experiencing pain in my right arm and yet visually experience the bottle the same way as if I felt the pain in my left arm. Similarly, the attribution of phenomenally seeing the bottle would arguably be the same, regardless of whether we notice behavioral indices of the agent's left or right arm pain.

Plausibly, the conscious is not always emotional, and the emotional is not always conscious. Emotions, then, are hardly definitive phenomenal states. Thus, establishing that the recognition of *phenomenal* consciousness in others drives the perception of moral patiency would likely require stronger evidence than currently available regarding the role of emotion attributions in moral thinking.

Conscious Mental State Attributions and Perception of Moral Agency

In contrast to the perception of moral patiency, perceiving moral agency is to be guided by attributions of capacities and states like problem-solving skills, intelligence, sophisticated planning and memory, having a mind, and free will: these capacities were used to control the agency level throughout studies reported in Jack and Robbins' 2012 paper. Their prediction and results were that the higher the perceived moral patiency, the lower the perceived moral agency (2012, p. 389–399). The impact of PS attributions should not extend outside the perceived moral patiency into the

perceived moral agency, as it would then be unclear how PS could be a mechanism generating moral concern[9]. But it does extend. In this section, I argue that this inverted relationship between the perception of moral patiency and moral agency does not correspond to consciousness attribution: one can attribute (phenomenal) conscious states to heighten perceived moral agency.

The inversion in moral perception is well-established. Results similar to those of Jack and Robbins were independently obtained by Gray and Wegner (2009), who labeled it "moral typecasting." Their research utilized the seminal two-dimensional model of mind perception by Gray et al. (2007), according to which folk mind perception goes in two directions named "agency" and "experience." The former comprises attributions of "self-control," "morality," "memory," "emotion recognition," "planning," "communication," and "thought," and the latter "hunger," "fear," "pain," "pleasure," "rage," "desire," "personality," "consciousness," "pride," "embarrassment," and "joy." The two-dimensional model has been highly impactful in social psychology. It has been shown to explain differences not only in moral thinking (Gray & Wegner, 2009; Gray et al., 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018) but also in perceptions of people in persistent vegetative states (Gray, Anne Knickman, et al., 2011), objectification of persons (Gray, Knobe, et al., 2011), mind perception in psychopathology (Gray, Jenkins, et al., 2011), and in the Uncanny Valley effect (Brink et al., 2019; Gray & Wegner, 2012).

The first piece of evidence that we should be concerned with involves making a relatively uncontroversial claim that phenomenality is one of the basic properties of consciousness: one is conscious of X only if cognition of X involves phenomenal properties or—in evolutionary terms—even the most primitive form of consciousness is phenomenal. This approach is not universally

[9] Jack and Robbins (2012, p. 402) remarked that some forms of sophisticated cognition typically accompany recognizing phenomenal consciousness, and point to aesthetic appreciation and social interactions. Their way of arguing is very telling in terms of the already discussed PS's overall reliance on emotions: "in our view the suggestion that a creature could be capable of sophisticated social, political, literary, musical and artistic behaviors … while lacking a rich emotional life and the ability to reflect upon those emotions, seems quite unintuitive." However, this does not seem to impact the dynamic of PS modulation of the perceived moral agency/patiency, as according to it, in any given situation of moral consideration, we will either rely on intentional stance (hence focusing on moral agency aspect) or on phenomenal stance (hence focusing on moral patiency aspect).

endorsed but is common (e.g., Edelman, 1989; Feinberg & Mallatt, 2016a; Koch, 2019; Revonsuo, 2010). In other words, to attribute *any* conscious state is to attribute a phenomenal state. If that is the case, attributing consciousness impacts perceived moral agency. Shepherd (2012) observed that when people are informed an agent's behavior results from conscious processing, they attribute both free will and responsibility to the agent. The inverse is true, too. If the behavior is depicted as resulting not from conscious processing, then the agent was perceived as neither free nor responsible. Later studies also indicated that recognizing conscious actions has more impact on free will than attributions of motivations, values, or personality traits (Shepherd 2015).

Attributions of general consciousness or conscious behavior are one thing, but let's focus on more specific aspects. The mental states and capacities that Jack and Robbins (2012) used to investigate the perception of moral agency— problem-solving skills, intelligence, sophisticated planning and memory, having a mind, and free will—fall easily into the conscious category. We have conscious minds and can experience volition. Remembering and recollecting, planning and solving, all of these can be executed consciously as well. Looking at states and capacities falling into the "agency" dimension of the two-dimensional model by Gray et al., we see a similar dynamic. We have conscious thoughts, consciously recognize the emotions of others, and so on. In short, for most, if not all of these moral agency-related states and capacities, we can undergo them consciously, with the accompaniment of phenomenal consciousness[10].

Some of the vignettes used by Shepherd arguably depict phenomenal states. Consider the conscious condition vignette used in the third study reported in 2015: "[humanoid creations] possess consciousness. They *actually feel* pain, *experience* emotion, *see* colors, and *consciously* deliberate about what to do" (p. 93). More recently, Björnsson and Shepherd (2020) have shown that the impact mentioned above works in both directions: consciousness attributions are modulated by

[10] This is why one ought not to conflate the dimension's label in Gray's model, "experience," with a shorthand for "phenomenal consciousness." Also, recognizing that we can consciously undergo states linked to 'agency,' as understood by Jack and Robbins (2012) and Gray et al. (2007), does not imply that agency itself is equated with consciousness. While states associated with agency are often consciously experienced, their conscious nature does not imply that agency itself is inherently tied to consciousness.

earlier attributions of free will and whether the agent's behavior is depicted as deterministic or not. The way consciousness was depicted in their vignettes was as follows: "(…) humanoid consciously sees colors, and consciously experiences emotions (like joy or fear)" (Björnsson & Shepherd, 2020, p. 555). Another piece of evidence that directly relates to PS's link with emotional states is Nahmias et al.'s (2019) results, indicating consciousness and free will attributions are mediated by attributions of emotional states.

Non-Emotional Conscious States Do Not Heighten Perceived Moral Patiency

Intriguingly, Nahmias et al.'s findings suggest that while attributions of emotions have a role to play in free will attribution, attributions of perceptions do not (2019, p. 76). Is it also true for the perception of moral patiency? According to the PS approach, attributions of different kinds of phenomenal states should all raise moral concern. To test this, I ran a modified version of the first study reported by Jack and Robbins (2012, p. 386-389), with the intention to investigate whether perceptual, emotional, and agency capacities impact the perception of moral patiency. The study involved 354 native English speakers recruited through MTurk for a small fee, with 41 participants removed from the analysis for failing to pass the attention and naivety checks (age 19–81, *m* = 38.81, 193 women, and 120 men)[11]. There were three conditions: agency (high agency capacity while low emotional and perceptual capacities), emotion ('experience' in the 2012 study; high emotional capacity while low agency and perceptual capacities), and perception (high perceptual capacity while low agency and emotional capacities). At the beginning, participants in each condition read the same vignette as in the 2012 experiment, with the story revolving around lobster fishing:

> In the Indonesian islands, lobsters are considered a great delicacy. They are caught by putting traps down on the ocean floor. The traps contain a small amount of food. The lobsters enter to eat the food and cannot get back out. Periodically, fishermen come and pull up their pots to check to see if there are any lobsters inside. They put

[11] Data, full analysis, and vignettes are available at OSF: https://osf.io/jy8n9/?view_only=1dfeb443f3964a689174111efea3292f.

> any lobsters they find into a large cage and bring them back to port. Back at port, the lobsters are quickly bought by local restaurants. They are killed quickly by boiling and they are almost always eaten the same night.
>
> Some fishermen do not check their lobster pots very regularly. When this happens, some lobsters may be stuck in the pot for as long as 2 weeks. Because the small amount of food runs out quickly, some lobsters starve to death in the pots.
>
> Some Indonesians are concerned about this. They don't want to stop people from eating lobsters, but they do want the lobsters to be treated humanely. They want to change the law so that fishermen have to check their pots more regularly, so that lobsters don't starve to death in the traps.

As in the original study, participants were then asked three pretest questions, dealing with (1) concern about the welfare of lobsters (0–10 response format, with 0 anchored at *not at all concerned* and 10 at *very concerned*), (2) guilt about harming them (0 = *[harming lobsters] would not affect me at all*, 10 = *I would feel absolutely terrible*) and (3) the severity of penalty for illegally harming lobsters (0 = *no penalty at all*, 10 = *bad offenders should serve jail time*). After that, participants in each condition read different additional information about lobsters. The parts regarding emotion and agency were the same as those in the Jack and Robbins study (2012, p. 387)[12]. Here is the vignette from the perception condition (high perceptual but low emotional and agency capacities):

> Now suppose that scientists made the following important discoveries about lobsters:
>
> Lobsters have rich and complex perception. They see, hear, and smell a lot, and their brain creates complex, multimodal, representations of their environment. The neural

[12] This means that pain was understood as predominantly emotional. While bodily sensations as types of experiences are sometimes distinguished from emotions, recognizing a capacity to have pain states is integral to the idea of the phenomenal stance, following Jack and Robbins' quote from earlier.

> systems responsible for their senses are similar in important aspects to the systems in the human brain.
>
> However, lobsters feel little or no emotion and are not especially intelligent. If stuck, they do not hesitate to hurt themselves in order to be able to move freely. They have no recognizable neural system for sensing pain or pleasure. Lobsters remember little about their environment. They forage for food simply by moving forward. The neural systems responsible for lobster memory are primitive and they have no recognizable system for reasoning.
>
> In short, lobsters have highly developed senses, but they are devoid of feeling and they are not very smart.

The vignette in the emotion condition (high emotional but low perceptual and agency capacities) was as follows:

> Now suppose that scientists made the following important discoveries about lobsters:
>
> Lobsters have rich and complex emotional lives. They are capable of suffering from depression and anxiety. The neural systems responsible for lobster emotion are similar in important respects to the systems in the human brain.
>
> However, lobsters are not especially intelligent and have very poor vision, hearing and other senses. They remember little about their environment. They forage for food simply by moving against ocean current. The neural systems responsible for lobster memory are primitive and they have no recognizable system for reasoning. Lobsters see, hear, and smell little: they do not perceive a lot. The neural systems responsible for their senses are primitive and they have no recognizable system for creating complex, multimodal representations of the environment.

> In short, lobsters feel a great deal, but they are not very smart and they have extremely bad senses.

Finally, the vignette in the agency condition (high agency but low perceptual and emotional capacities) was as follows:

> Now suppose that scientists made the following important discoveries about lobsters:
>
> Lobsters are highly intelligent. They form elaborate search strategies to forage for food. The neural systems responsible for their memory and reasoning are similar in important aspects to the systems in the human brain.
>
> However, lobsters feel little or no emotion and have very poor vision, hearing and other senses. If stuck, they do not hesitate to hurt themselves in order to be able to move freely. They have no recognizable neural system for sensing pain or pleasure. Lobsters see, hear, and smell little: they do not perceive a lot. The neural systems responsible for lobster senses are primitive and they have no recognizable system for creating complex, multimodal representations of the environment.
>
> In short, lobsters are very smart, but they are devoid of feeling and they have extremely bad senses.

After reading the story, participants were asked to answer the same three questions as they had before[13].

[13] The vignettes do not signal conscious character of the mental states and capacities. Indeed, they do not explicitly mention consciousness, but neither did the original vignettes used by Robbins and Jack in their 2012 study, which were, after all, designed to test the use of phenomenal stance. In preparing this study, I decided to remain as close to the original approach as possible.

Results and Discussion

The three-way mixed ANOVA indicated significant effects, including a three-way interaction, Condition × Manipulation × Question, $F(4,620) = 3.558$; $p < .01$; $\eta_g^2 = .0007$, two-way interactions for Condition × Manipulation, $F(2,310) = 27.538$; $p < .001$; $\eta_g^2 = .01$; and Manipulation × Question, $F(2,620) = 11.419$; $p < .001$; $\eta_g^2 = .001$; and main effects for Manipulation, $F(1,310) = 15.154$; $p < .001$; $\eta_g^2 = .003$; and Question, $F(2,620) = 135.781$; $p < .001$; $\eta_g^2 = .09$. In the emotion condition, reading the second part of the story resulted in participants being more concerned, $t(101) = 4.26$; $p < .001$; $d = .42$; 95% CI [.41,1.13], and wanting higher penalty than at baseline $t(101) = 3.33$; $p < .05$; $d = .33$; 95% CI [.18,.72]. In the perception condition, participants felt less concern $t(103) = -3.9$; $p < .001$; $d = -.38$; 95% CI [-.81,-.26]; less guilt, $t(103) = -5.6$; $p < .001$; $d = -.55$; 95% CI [.-1.25,-.6]; and favored lower penalties, $t(103) = -5.66$; $p < .001$; $d = -.55$; 95% CI [-.9,-.43], than at baseline. In the agency condition, the manipulation generally lowered the perceived moral patiency, concern: $t(106) = -4.11$; $p < .001$; $d = -.4$; 95% CI [-1.09,-.38]; guilt: $t(106) = -4.88$; $p < .001$; $d = -.47$; 95% CI [-1.3,-.55]; penalty: $t(106) = -2.19$; $p < .05$; $d = -.21$; 95% CI [-.55,-.03][14]. These results are presented in Figure 1.

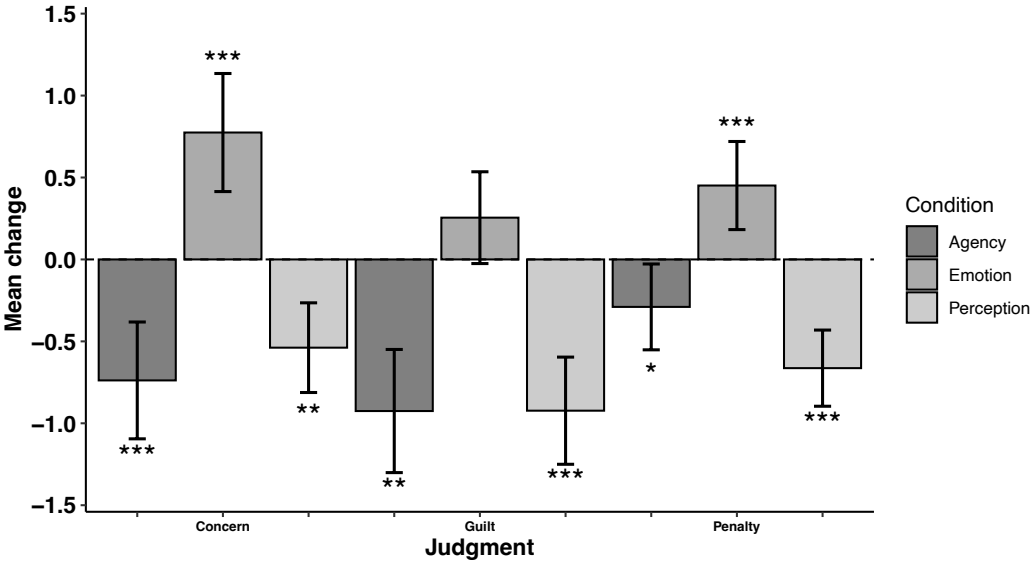

*Figure 1 Results With Mean Changes per Question and Condition Relative to Baseline at p: '***' < .001, '**' < .01, '*' < .05.*

[14] All post-hoc t-tests were Bonferroni corrected for multiple comparisons. Pretest and posttest means and standard deviations are available in the Supplementary Materials at OSF.

These results suggest that the relationship with the perceived moral patiency is opposite for attributions of emotional states compared to perceptual states. The folk psychology account of perception seems to impact moral patiency similarly to the recognition of agency-related capacities.

One might worry that vignettes separating agency, emotional, and perceptual dispositions are confusing, and thus participants' responses do not reflect their perception of moral patiency. I will expand on this worry as it illustrates how the curse of knowledge impacts scholars' thinking about folk psychology. First, the confusion is not reflected in the data. Participants responded consistently in each condition. Only a combination of high emotion with low perception and agency made responses higher than the baseline. If participants had been confused about lobsters' mental capacities, the results might have appeared more random.

Second, laypeople can easily differentiate between emotional and perceptual capacities (Gray et al., 2007; Weisman et al., 2017). The confusing part may relate to the perceived plausibility of natural selection favoring only one type of capacity. While the evolution of the nervous system is an ongoing research endeavor (Jákely et al., 2015; Moroz et al., 2014; Paulin & Cahill-Lane, 2021), at least to some extent, the neuronal organization and evolutionary history appear to be different for exteroception and interoception (Carvalho & Damasio, 2021; Feinberg & Mallatt, 2016a, 2016b). And even if the rise of exteroceptive processes were conditioned on the presence of interoceptive processing, it would be largely inconsequential to folk psychology. A substantial number of laypeople in the world reject the idea of biological evolution. Depending on the country, the percentage of skeptics ranges from 20% to 70% (Ecklund et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2006; Pew Research Center, 2015, 2017). And it is implausible that those who believe in biological evolution have a nuanced view of the evolution of nervous systems or consciousness[15].

[15] The choice of lobsters followed the design of Robbins and Jack (2012), but exploring other creatures, such as insects or plants, could provide further insights into moral patiency attributions. Future research might examine how factors such as perceived similarity to humans, familiarity, and other traits impact the perception of moral patiency across a range of species.

The Affective Stance

The 'phenomenal stance' label proved to be misleading. According to the theory, one exercises PS to care about other agents. I provided multiple reasons to reject that this is the case. Research on explicit consciousness attributions indicates that the road from attributing consciousness to moral reasoning is not straightforward, whether when deciding who is responsible or whom to care about. Recognizing consciousness plausibly plays a role in moral reasoning, but this role is not simply the heightening of moral patiency perception. Furthermore, there is the issue that laypeople likely do not recognize the phenomenality of mental states, which casts doubt on the basic assumption made by endorsers of the PS account. Still, we do care about some agents more than others, and I think we can view our tendency to perceive moral patients as a stance, albeit not "phenomenal." Let's call it the *affective* stance. It is deeply rooted in emotion attribution; however, not all attributions of emotions are instances of the affective stance.

I use 'emotion' liberally here to account for various affective attributions, from basic positive and negative affects, basic and complex emotions, to long-lasting moods. Psychology research offers rich accounts of such attributions, mainly in empathy research. Empathy has been variously understood, but it is widely accepted that it has cognitive and affective aspects (Cuff et al., 2016), underpinned by partly separate neural networks (Fan et al., 2011). The former involves understanding another's emotions, and the affective empathy involves actually experiencing emotions. Affective perspective-taking, inferring emotions felt by others by imagining a situation from another person's point of view, contributes to the cognitive form of empathy (Bensalah et al., 2016; Sebastian et al., 2012), while emotion sharing—or contagion, the automatic and covert replication of another person's emotional state in oneself—contributes to affective empathy (Dezecache et al., 2015; Prochazkova & Kret, 2017).

In some cases, both types of empathy fall under the affective stance. We can care about someone without undergoing an emotional state similar to the one another person undergoes. While reading vignettes from the reported study, participants didn't have to feel the emotional capacities

of lobsters (what would that even mean?) or the pain of starving to death to start being more concerned about them. But consider a more human-centric instance of perspective-taking: I feel more concerned about a person when I imagine she is imprisoned in a dark dungeon than a person in a modern Norwegian prison. However, the affective stance often is affective empathy: I might have a joyful evening meeting a friend, but my positive emotions would dive if she started crying. Consequently, I would not feel as positive but would be more concerned about my friend and invested in helping her.

However, empathy often also involves adopting the intentional stance. For instance, if I imagine the perspective of a person yelling at a vending machine, I deduce that she is angry because the machine is malfunctioning. It's reasonable to assume that she will either strike the machine or contact the maintenance company. This ascription of anger was an instance of the intentional stance: emotion was clearly targeted at the machine, and because I identified anger, I could explain and predict another person's behavior. Cognitive empathy works in this predicting context especially well. In psychology research, the concept of intentional stance is rarely referred to explicitly, but some researchers identify cognitive empathy with related constructs such as the *theory of mind* and *mentalizing* (Preckel et al., 2018), constructs often taken to be synonymous with the concept of intentional stance (Frith & Frith, 2005; Thellman et al., 2022)[16]. Indeed, performance on cognitive empathy tasks correlated with the theory of mind scores (Bensalah et al., 2016). Given that there is more to the theory of mind than just attribution of emotions, a more nuanced distinction is the one between the *cognitive theory of mind,* understood as attributions of beliefs, knowledge, and desires, and the *affective theory of mind*, i.e., cognitive empathy (Sebastian et al., 2012). Intentional stance refers to those uses of the theory of mind and/or empathy in which we are focused/motivated on

[16] Some differentiate "intentional stance" from constructs like "theory of mind" used in developmental psychology, due to how the two are operationalized and to what larger theories they belong (e.g., Marchesi et al., 2019, 373), but all such constructs relate to the capacity to attribute mental states to explain behavior. Also, introduction of "theory of mind" phrase in Premack's and Woodruff's seminal paper (1978) happened in the midst of philosophical discussion surrounding folk psychology of beliefs, desires, and other intentional mental states (e.g., Dennett, 1971; Stich, 1978).

explaining an agent's behavior, which might explain why proponents of PS account view this stance as closely related to recognizing moral agency. After all, identifying agency requires direct or indirect cues about behavior, such as expressions or purely situational factors suggesting past or future potential actions of an agent. On the other hand, the affective stance stems from being focused on our recognition of agents' evaluation of their situation—in the basic meaning of "evaluation," i.e., feeling a positive or negative attitude towards something.

Being concerned about something often involves experiencing compassion. Compassion is perhaps not a basic emotional state. It may be a mixture of emotions like joy, love, warmth, and others. Neuroimaging studies suggest such a complementary emotional response to the perceived negative emotions of others has a different neuronal organization from both affective and cognitive forms of empathy (Preckel et al., 2018). Is the affective stance linked to compassion? Yes, when I feel compassion toward X, I have a positive attitude toward X's well-being; it facilitates prosocial behavior (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). Similarly, the affective stance is linked to sympathy. The latter is a concept similar to compassion, relating to the feeling of concern about others but lacking the motivation needed to help them (Gilbert, 2015).

The idea of the affective stance is broad by design. It allows us to capture a wide range of perceiving and responding to the emotions of others. There is an abundance of research regarding emotion attribution and the significance of emotional processing to moral cognition (Bzdok et al., 2015; Decety & Cowell, 2014; Moll et al., 2005). Adding the idea of affective stance to the mix of theoretical constructs is, nevertheless, beneficial for the field. It makes discussing our tendency to perceive moral patiency independent from constraints of more detailed theoretical perspectives in social cognition or folk psychology research. The concept of the affective stance is just as high-level as the concept of the intentional stance. It picks out our tendency to perceive moral patiency, just as the intentional stance picks out our tendency to explain and predict the behavior of other agents. The former influences our prosocial behavior, while the latter helps us thrive in the environment. We exercise the intentional stance differently, depending on personality, situational, and developmental

factors (e.g., Gergely et al., 1995; Gergely & Csibra, 2003; German et al., 2004; Nettle & Liddle, 2008). Similarly, as described above, we exercise the affective stance differently. Finally, just as the intentional stance is not the only road to explaining and predicting behavior, the affective stance is not the only road to caring about others. Aside from emotion attribution, moral concern can stem from cultural norms or one's ethical principles[17].

Distinguishing the affective stance from other stances also paints a clearer picture of how consciousness attribution is *not* realized in our cognitive systems. From the point of view of the person who adopts the affective stance, it does not matter how conscious the agent is. This may initially sound counterintuitive, but this is analogous to the intentional stance. Attributing belief does not equal attributing possession of the mind (Thellman et al., 2022, p. 2). The most widely known demonstration of this point is Heider and Simmel's experiment (1944), in which we perceive geometric shapes as desire-driven but not as mind-bearers[18]. Obviously, when we think from the perspective of being a cognitive system, having beliefs or perceptions depends on having a mind. As mentioned earlier, perhaps to appreciate the world affectively, one needs some form of consciousness as well. But even if one depends on the other, it is not the reality of our inclination to view others as affects-bearers.

Concluding Remarks

The idea of the phenomenal stance pinpoints our disposition to regard others as moral patients, a tendency that has been largely omitted in folk psychology research. While this proposal extends the conceptual foundations of the latter field, there are justified reasons for rejecting it: the complex relationship between mental state attributions and moral perception and the folk attributions of mental states not being driven by the recognition of their phenomenality. In place of PS, I proposed the affective stance: the tendency to recognize emotional states in others that guides

[17] The affective stance is clearly not Dennett's personal stance. First, the former is limited to emotion state attributions, the latter is not. Second, the personal stance is dependent on the intentional stance and we can attribute emotions without recognizing whether these emotions will lead to some particular behavior.
[18] See also Dennett's point on the relationship between having beliefs and predictability of intentional stance (1987, p. 29).

our perception of moral patiency. Although the concept of affective stance requires further exploration, its potential implications for our understanding of moral patiency, folk psychology, and consciousness are significant. I will now turn to concluding remarks, where I summarize these implications.

One might worry that there is little value in replacing the phenomenal with the affective stance as they seemingly differ slightly. However, the problem with the concept of PS is not about whether we rely on folk psychology in our everyday moral perception. We do. The problematic issue is hinging large parts of moral perception on laypeople being proficient recognizers of the phenomenality of mental states. This reliance has already started to impact empirical investigations and how we view moral status. For instance, Spatola et al. (2021) utilized PS's framework to investigate human-robot interactions, while Banks and Bowman (2023) developed a scale to measure the perceived moral patiency of robots. In neuro- and bioethics, there is a lively debate on whether having a phenomenal consciousness is fit as a criterion of having a moral status (e.g., A. Y. Lee, 2022; Sawai et al., 2019; Shepherd, 2023). If, despite the evidence, we keep insisting that phenomenal consciousness is obvious and self-evident for laypeople, we may distort how we operationalize consciousness, emotions, and other mental faculties in human-robot interaction studies and in the ethical debate. Moreover, we will remain at risk of circular argumentation: when we study mental state attribution, we assume laypeople can recognize phenomenal states because we deem phenomenality to be obvious, but when we are to defend the view that the phenomenality of mental states is obvious, we point to the results of these very studies. The initial intuition, in other words, becomes a justification of itself. Viewing moral perception as a result of an interplay between adopting the intentional and the affective stance removes these risks.

Future work is needed to fully incorporate the affective stance account into more detailed theories of how emotion attributions impact social and moral cognition. Aside from the affective stance, however, the leftover from rejecting the idea of PS is the folk view about consciousness. It proved especially challenging to study since unequivocally discerning consciousness from other

mental states and cognitive capacities is controversial even among scholars. Folk's thinking about consciousness, plausibly, is not responsible for modulating the perception of moral patiency, nor is it consistent with the concept of phenomenal consciousness. So how else does this thinking impact folk perceptions of other agents? And even more generally, future research could shed more light on other intricacies of folk psychology, including what guides our conative and cognitive attributions. Pursuing this line of inquiry may eventually uncover a broader taxonomy of mental stances shaping our interactions and perceptions of other agents. As folk psychology research has started to incorporate empathy-related findings from social and affective psychology, an even more comprehensive study of mental stances may emerge.

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