

DEC 02 2011

SUSAN M SPRAUL, CLERK  
U.S. BKCY. APP. PANEL  
OF THE NINTH CIRCUIT

ORDERED PUBLISHED

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY APPELLATE PANEL  
OF THE NINTH CIRCUIT

6	In re:	)	BAP No.	SC-10-1423-MkHKi
		)		
7	JASON BELICE AND MISHELLE	)	Bk. No.	09-14236
	BELICE,	)		
8		)	Adv. No.	09-90576
	Debtors.	)		
9	_____	)		
		)		
10	MICHAEL BARNES,	)		
		)		
11	Appellant,	)		
		)		
12	v.	)	<b>OPINION</b>	
		)		
13	JASON BELICE,	)		
		)		
14	Appellee.	)		
15	_____	)		

Argued and Submitted on October 20, 2011  
at San Diego, California

Filed - December 2, 2011

Appeal from the United States Bankruptcy Court  
for the Southern District of California

Honorable Peter W. Bowie, Chief Bankruptcy Judge, Presiding

Appearances: Michael L. Klein of Greenman, Lacy, Klein, O'Harra  
& Heffron appeared on behalf of Appellant Michael Barnes.\*

Before: MARKELL, HOLLOWELL and KIRSCHER, Bankruptcy Judges.

\* No one appeared at oral argument on behalf of Jason Belice, and the panel deemed Mr. Belice's position submitted on the briefs filed. Subsequently, counsel for Mr. Belice requested that the panel reset oral argument, or allow him to file a letter brief in lieu of oral argument. The panel denied the motion.

1 MARKELL, Bankruptcy Judge:  
2

3 **INTRODUCTION**

4 Plaintiff Michael Barnes ("Barnes") claims debtor Jason  
5 Belice ("Belice") obtained loans from him by fraud. When Belice  
6 filed a chapter 7<sup>1</sup> bankruptcy and attempted to discharge those  
7 debts, Barnes objected. He filed an adversary proceeding under  
8 § 523(a)(2), alleging that Belice lied about various parts of his  
9 financial life and his assets in order to obtain the loan.

10 Belice objected to Barnes' complaint, and the bankruptcy  
11 court granted several motions by Belice to dismiss it.  
12 Ultimately, the bankruptcy court held that Belice's alleged lies  
13 and misrepresentations about specific assets were "statement[s]  
14 respecting the debtor's . . . financial condition" as  
15 contemplated by § 523(a)(2)(A). It thus dismissed Barnes'  
16 complaint. We disagree, and REVERSE and REMAND.

17 **BACKGROUND**

18 Belice and his wife filed their chapter 7 bankruptcy  
19 petition on September 22, 2009. Upon review, the clerk  
20 classified Belices' case as a no-asset bankruptcy case. The  
21 Belices' schedules listed only roughly \$10,000 in exempt personal  
22 property.<sup>2</sup>

---

23  
24 <sup>1</sup> Unless specified otherwise, all chapter and section  
25 references are to the Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101-1532, and  
26 all "Rule" references are to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy  
27 Procedure, Rules 1001-9037. All "Civil Rule" references are to  
the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

28 <sup>2</sup> We obtained this information by reviewing the items on  
the bankruptcy court's automated bankruptcy case docket in the  
(continued...)

1 Barnes filed his first nondischargeability complaint in  
2 December 2009. This complaint alleged that Barnes had lent  
3 Belice \$15,000 ("Loan") in March 2008 based in part on Belice's  
4 representation that he would and did provide adequate security.  
5 The security offered was a warrant purportedly entitling Barnes  
6 to acquire 30% of Belice's interest in a partnership known as the  
7 Belice-Mehta Partnership. The warrant's strike price was the  
8 satisfaction of all amounts owed on the Loan.

9 The complaint alleged that Belice's representation regarding  
10 the nature of the security was false. It further alleged that  
11 Belice knowingly and intentionally made this misrepresentation  
12 with the intent to deceive Barnes and to induce him to make the  
13 Loan. In addition, Barnes' complaint indicated that Barnes later  
14 lent Belice another \$10,000 based on the same misrepresentation.  
15 Barnes thus claimed damages of \$25,000 plus interest as Belice  
16 never repaid anything and the security given was worthless.

17 In February 2010, Belice moved to dismiss Barnes' complaint  
18 under Civil Rule 12(b)(6) ("First Motion To Dismiss"), arguing  
19 that the complaint did not sufficiently allege claims for relief  
20 under any of the nondischargeability grounds cited.<sup>3</sup> Barnes

---

21  
22 <sup>2</sup>(...continued)  
23 Belices' bankruptcy case. We may take judicial notice of the  
24 contents and filing of these items. See Atwood v. Chase  
25 Manhattan Mortg. Co. (In re Atwood), 293 B.R. 227, 233 n.9 (9th  
26 Cir. BAP 2003) (citing O'Rourke v. Seaboard Sur. Co. (In re E.R.  
27 Fegert, Inc.), 887 F.2d 955, 957-58 (9th Cir. 1989)).

28 <sup>3</sup> Civil Rule 12(b)(6) applies in bankruptcy through  
application of Rule 7012(b).

Belice's response to the First Motion To Dismiss contained  
his own version of the circumstances surrounding the Loan, and he  
(continued...)

1 disagreed.<sup>4</sup>

2 The bankruptcy court granted Belice's motion, stating that  
3 Barnes' allegations regarding Belice's misrepresentations about  
4 the proposed collateral were not sufficiently specific. But the  
5 court went further and identified another flaw in Barnes'  
6 § 523(a)(2)(A) claim: according to the court, any  
7 misrepresentation regarding the value of the proposed collateral  
8 would have been a "statement respecting the debtor's or an  
9 insider's financial condition." If correct, any fraud based on  
10 those representations would be excluded from § 523(a)(2)(A).

11 The court thus granted the First Motion to Dismiss, but did  
12 so without prejudice to Barnes amending his complaint. Barnes  
13 then filed a first amended complaint which attempted to address  
14 the court's concerns. In particular, Barnes alleged that Belice  
15 had made the following false statements:

16 a) Debtor's [Belice's] monthly salary as an  
17 attorney . . . was \$30,000;

18  
19 <sup>3</sup>(...continued)  
20 has reiterated these factual assertions in his brief on appeal.  
21 Nothing in the record indicates that the bankruptcy court  
22 considered Belice's version of the facts, nor will we. In  
23 considering Civil Rule 12(b)(6) motions, a court must accept as  
24 true all well-pled facts, unaffected by any contrary factual  
25 assertions. Johnson v. Riverside Healthcare Sys., 534 F.3d 1116,  
26 1122 (9th Cir. 2008) (citing Broam v. Bogan, 320 F.3d 1023, 1028  
27 (9th Cir. 2003)).

28 <sup>4</sup> Barnes' original complaint had also sought declarations  
of nondischargeability under §§ 523(a)(4) and (a)(6). Barnes  
expressly abandoned his § 523(a)(4) claim at the hearing on the  
First Motion To Dismiss. Barnes abandoned his § 523(a)(6) claim  
when he did not challenge on appeal the court's dismissal of that  
claim. See Golden v. Chicago Title Ins. Co. (In re Choo), 273  
B.R. 608, 613 (9th Cir. BAP 2002) (holding that arguments not  
raised in the appellant's opening brief are deemed waived).

1 b) Debtor had made a \$100,000 profit on the sale of his  
2 La Jolla residence in 2007;

3 c) Debtor was paying \$7,000 per month in rent which he  
4 could well afford;

5 d) Debtor was a San Diego Charger [sic] season ticket  
6 holder;

7 e) Debtor had purchased a \$28,000 diamond engagement  
8 ring in July 2007;

9 f) Debtor voluntarily left [his law firm] in late 2007  
10 because of more lucrative income in the luxury  
11 transportation sector (helicopter and jet service) and  
12 his involvement with a computer systems company;

13 g) The security for Plaintiff's loan would be a partial  
14 ownership interest in the BELICE-MEHTA PARTNERSHIP, an  
15 investor in an entertainment establishment in Macau,  
16 called the Monkey Bar;

17 h) The Monkey Bar was extremely successful, would  
18 likely be sold to the Sands Casino company in 2008, and  
19 would provide the Debtor with yet another revenue  
20 source; and

21 i) Debtor's interest in the BELICE-MEHTA PARTNERSHIP  
22 was worth far more than the loan from the Plaintiff to  
23 the Debtor.

24 First amended complaint (July 7, 2010) at 3:18-4:13. Barnes  
25 further alleged that Belice had fraudulently failed to disclose  
26 that Belice was being sued for \$530,000 as a guarantor of a debt  
27 of a company known as Running Horse Development Group, LLC (the  
28 "Running Horse Liability").

Belice filed a motion to dismiss the first amended  
complaint, which the court also granted without prejudice. We do  
not know the basis for this ruling.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Neither party ordered the transcript from the June 2010  
hearing on the Second Motion To Dismiss, so we do not know  
precisely how or why the court ruled as it did on the Second  
Motion To Dismiss, but the statements the court later made when

(continued...)

1 Barnes then duly filed a second amended complaint, the  
2 complaint that is at issue in this appeal (the "Complaint").  
3 Although he made some nonmaterial changes, he did not change the  
4 series of Belice's alleged misrepresentations, including the  
5 assertion that the failure to disclose the Running Horse  
6 Liability was a misrepresentation precluding discharge.

7 Belice moved yet again to dismiss the Complaint with  
8 prejudice. At the hearing, the bankruptcy court based its  
9 decision on familiar grounds: "The bulk of my problem remains the  
10 same as it was the last time around . . . . And that is, it  
11 appears to me that the representations of which you complain are  
12 representations going to financial condition." Hr'g Tr. (Sept.  
13 13, 2010) at 4:8-11.

14 Barnes countered that the court should apply the strict  
15 definition of the phrase "statement respecting financial  
16 condition" applied in Cadwell v. Joelson (In re Joelson), 427  
17 F.3d 700 (10th Cir. 2005) and in Eugene Parks Law Corp. Defined  
18 Benefit Pension Plan v. Kirsh (In re Kirsh), 973 F.2d 1454, 1457  
19 (9th Cir. 1992). Under this definition, he asserted, the  
20 Complaint allegations regarding Belice's misrepresentations were  
21 sufficient to state a claim under § 523(a)(2)(A).

22 The court disagreed. It again ruled against Barnes. The  
23 court also expressed the view that Barnes had not alleged and  
24

---

25 <sup>5</sup>(...continued)  
26 it dismissed Barnes' Complaint indicate that, in large part, the  
27 court granted the Second Motion To Dismiss because it construed  
28 all of the alleged misrepresentations to be "statement[s]  
respecting the debtor's or an insider's financial condition"  
expressly excluded from coverage under § 523(a)(2)(A).

1 could not allege any duty to disclose the Running Horse  
2 Liability.

3 On October 21, 2010, the bankruptcy court entered a short  
4 memorandum and order in which it reasoned that Barnes'  
5 allegations were insufficient under § 523(a)(2)(A) because they  
6 consisted of oral statements respecting Belice's financial  
7 condition, and as such could not be used to support a claim under  
8 § 523(a)(2)(A). Even though Belice had requested that any  
9 dismissal be with prejudice, the bankruptcy court without  
10 explanation crossed out the words "with prejudice" from Belice's  
11 proposed form of order.

12 On November 3, 2010, Barnes filed a notice of appeal.

### 13 JURISDICTION

14 The bankruptcy court's striking of "with prejudice" in the  
15 proposed form or order raises a jurisdictional issue. When a  
16 court dismisses a complaint without prejudice, the plaintiff may  
17 file an amended complaint even if the dismissal order does not  
18 expressly state that leave to amend is granted. See McCrary v.  
19 Barrack (In re Barrack), 217 B.R. 598, 603 n.4 (9th Cir. BAP  
20 1998).<sup>6</sup> An order dismissing a complaint without prejudice is an

---

21  
22 <sup>6</sup> When an order dismissing a complaint is silent as to  
23 whether the dismissal is with or without prejudice, we must  
24 determine whether the bankruptcy court intended the order to  
25 fully and finally dispose of the entire lawsuit. Mendondo v.  
26 Centinela Hosp. Med. Ctr., 521 F.3d 1097, 1102 (9th Cir. 2008);  
27 Knevelbaard Dairies v. Kraft Foods, Inc., 232 F.3d 979, 983 (9th  
28 Cir. 2000). This is consistent with the general rule that we  
must look beyond the labels used by the bankruptcy court, and  
instead determine what effect the court intended that its order  
have. Disabled Rights Action Comm. v. Las Vegas Events, Inc.,  
375 F.3d 861, 870 (9th Cir. 2004) (citing Nat'l Distrib. Agency

(continued...)

1 interlocutory order. Id.; WMX Techs., Inc. v. Miller, 104 F.3d  
2 1133, 1136-37 (9th Cir. 1997) (en banc).

3 We generally lack jurisdiction to hear an appeal from an  
4 interlocutory order, unless we grant leave to appeal. See  
5 Giesbrecht v. Fitzgerald (In re Giesbrecht), 429 B.R. 682, 687  
6 (9th Cir. BAP 2010). Under Rule 8003, however, we may treat a  
7 notice of appeal as a motion for leave to file an interlocutory  
8 appeal. And we typically grant leave to appeal when "the order

9  
10  
11 <sup>6</sup>(...continued)

12 v. Nationwide Mut. Ins. Co., 117 F.3d 432, 433 (9th Cir. 1997)).  
13 Under this standard, we do not treat an order dismissing a  
14 complaint as final and appealable unless the bankruptcy court  
15 clearly manifested its intent that the dismissal order be its  
16 final act in the matter. See Disabled Rights Action Comm., 375  
17 F.3d at 870 (citing Campbell Indus., Inc. v. Offshore Logistics  
18 Int'l, Inc., 816 F.2d 1401, 1404 (9th Cir. 1987)); see also Casey  
19 v. Albertson's Inc., 362 F.3d 1254, 1258 (9th Cir. 2004) (stating  
20 that decision is not considered final for appeal purposes unless  
21 the decision: (1) fully adjudicates the issues and (2) "clearly  
22 evidences the judge's intention that it be the court's final act  
23 in the matter."). Here, there are several indications that the  
24 bankruptcy court did not intend the dismissal order to be its  
25 final act in the adversary proceeding. First and foremost, it  
26 crossed out the words "with prejudice" from Belice's proposed  
27 form of order. Further, the order dismissed the complaint, as  
28 opposed to dismissing the underlying adversary proceeding. See  
Disabled Rights Action Comm., 375 F.3d at 870 (citing Montes v.  
United States, 37 F.3d 1347, 1350 (9th Cir. 1994)). Finally,  
there is no indication in the record that the bankruptcy court  
ever determined that the lawsuit could not be saved by amendment.  
Id. The court never said that Barnes could not state a viable  
claim for relief; rather, the court said "I'm just afraid that  
the facts, at least after the second try, just don't support  
where you want to go." Hr'g Tr. (Sept. 13, 2010) at 9:2-  
3(emphasis added). We acknowledge that, shortly after the  
dismissal order was entered, a docket clerk entered on the docket  
a notation that the adversary proceeding was closed. This  
notation by itself, however, does not persuade us that the court  
clearly manifested its intent that the dismissal order would be  
its final act in the matter.

1 involves [1] a controlling question of law [2] where there is  
2 substantial ground for difference of opinion and [3] when the  
3 appeal is in the best interests of judicial economy because an  
4 immediate appeal may materially advance the ultimate termination  
5 of the litigation.” Travers v. Dragul (In re Travers), 202 B.R.  
6 624, 626 (9th Cir. BAP 1996); see also Magno v. Rigsby (In re  
7 Magno), 216 B.R. 34, 38 (9th Cir. BAP 1997) (granting leave to  
8 appeal under the Travers standard).

9 Here, the validity of the order appealed from involves a  
10 controlling question of law concerning the meaning of  
11 § 523(a) (2) (A)’s phrase “statement respecting the debtor’s . . .  
12 financial condition.” As discussed below, the meaning of that  
13 phrase is unsettled. Moreover, exercising jurisdiction here  
14 would serve the interests of judicial economy by resolving the  
15 meaning of that disputed phrase. In turn, this enables the  
16 parties to move on and address the other issues essential to the  
17 eventual disposition of the underlying adversary proceeding.

18 Indeed, although the bankruptcy court appears to have  
19 dismissed the Complaint without prejudice, the record before us  
20 strongly suggests that the court and Barnes had reached an  
21 impasse. Barnes over time had narrowed his focus to a single  
22 claim for relief under § 523(a) (2) (A), and the court had  
23 consistently concluded that Barnes’ core allegations were  
24 insufficient to state a claim under § 523(a) (2) (A).

25 While the better practice would have been for Barnes, before  
26 filing his notice of appeal, to file a written notice of his  
27 election to forego any further amendments to his Complaint so  
28 that the court could enter a final judgment of dismissal of the

1 adversary proceeding, WMX Techs., 104 F.3d at 1135-36, we have no  
2 trouble concluding here, under the particular circumstances of  
3 this matter, that the interests of everyone involved - Barnes,  
4 Belice and the bankruptcy court - will be best served by our  
5 hearing and deciding this appeal now. We thus grant leave to  
6 appeal.

7 **STANDARDS OF REVIEW AND CIVIL RULE 12(b)(6) LEGAL STANDARDS**

8 We review a dismissal under Civil Rule 12(b)(6) de novo.  
9 See AlohaCare v. Hawaii Dept. of Human Services, 572 F.3d 740,  
10 744 n.2 (9th Cir. 2009). We also review the bankruptcy court's  
11 interpretation of the Bankruptcy Code de novo. See W. States  
12 Glass Corp. of N. Cal. (In re Bay Area Glass, Inc.), 454 B.R. 86,  
13 88 (9th Cir. BAP 2011).

14 When we conduct a de novo review, "we look at the matter  
15 anew, the same as if it had not been heard before, and as if no  
16 decision previously had been rendered, giving no deference to the  
17 bankruptcy court's determinations." Charlie Y., Inc. v. Carey  
18 (In re Carey), 446 B.R. 384, 389 (9th Cir. BAP 2011); see also  
19 B-Real, LLC v. Chaussee (In re Chaussee), 399 B.R. 225, 229 (9th  
20 Cir. BAP 2008).

21 As a result, in order to decide this appeal, we apply the  
22 same legal standards governing motions to dismiss under Civil  
23 Rule 12(b)(6) that apply in all federal courts. "A Rule 12(b)(6)  
24 dismissal may be based on either a 'lack of a cognizable legal  
25 theory' or 'the absence of sufficient facts alleged under a  
26 cognizable legal theory.'" Johnson, 534 F.3d at 1121 (quoting  
27 Balistreri v. Pacifica Police Dept., 901 F.2d 696, 699 (9th Cir.  
28 1990)).

1 Under Civil Rule 12(b)(6), a court must also construe the  
2 complaint in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, and must  
3 accept all well-pleaded factual allegations as true. Johnson,  
4 534 F.3d at 1122; Knox v. Davis, 260 F.3d 1009, 1012 (9th Cir.  
5 2001).

6 In both instances, the key is whether the allegations are  
7 well-pled; a court is not bound by conclusory statements,  
8 statements of law, or unwarranted inferences cast as factual  
9 allegations. Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57  
10 (2007). "While a complaint attacked by a Rule 12(b)(6) motion to  
11 dismiss does not need detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's  
12 obligation to provide the 'grounds' of his 'entitlement to  
13 relief' requires more than labels and conclusions, and a  
14 formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will  
15 not do." Id. at 555 (citations omitted). "In practice, a  
16 complaint . . . must contain either direct or inferential  
17 allegations respecting all the material elements necessary to  
18 sustain recovery under some viable legal theory." Id. at 562  
19 (quoting Car Carriers, Inc. v. Ford Motor Co., 745 F.2d 1101,  
20 1106 (7th Cir. 1984)).

21 The Court elaborated on the Twombly standard in Ashcroft v.  
22 Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 129 S.Ct. 1937, 1949 (2009), as follows:

23 To survive a motion to dismiss, a complaint must  
24 contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to  
25 state a claim to relief that is plausible on its  
26 face. . . . A claim has facial plausibility when the  
27 plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court  
28 to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is  
liable for the misconduct alleged. . . . Threadbare  
recitals of the elements of a cause of action,  
supported by mere conclusory statements, do not  
suffice.

1 Id. (citations and internal quotation marks omitted.)

2 With these standards in mind, we turn our attention to the  
3 proper construction of Barnes' claim for relief under  
4 § 523(a)(2)(A). Once we have set out the limits of  
5 § 523(a)(2)(A), we then can determine whether Barnes alleged a  
6 viable claim for relief under that provision.

7 **DISCUSSION**

8 **A. The correct legal standard regarding whether**  
9 **misrepresentations are "statement[s] respecting the**  
10 **debtor's . . . financial condition."**

11 Section 523(a)(2)(A) excepts debts from discharge when those  
12 debts were incurred by way of "false pretenses, false  
13 representation, or actual fraud . . . ." But not all fraud leads  
14 to nondischargeability. Congress expressly excluded oral  
15 "statement[s] respecting the debtor's or an insider's financial  
16 condition" from § 523(a)(2)(A)'s coverage. In short, oral  
17 misrepresentations regarding financial condition are  
18 dischargeable.

19 Had Congress defined the phrase "respecting the  
20 debtor's . . . financial condition," we could easily resolve this  
21 and many other cases. But it did not, and courts have sharply  
22 differed over its proper scope. See Spencer v. Bogdanovich (In  
23 re Bogdanovich), 292 F.3d 104, 112-13 (2d Cir. 2002) (listing  
24 cases); see also Christopher W. Frost, Nondischargeability Based  
25 on Fraud: What Constitutes a "Statement Respecting the Debtor's  
26 Financial Condition?", 26 Bankr. L. Ltr. 1, 5 (Issue No. 4 April  
27 2006) (stating that courts interpreting the scope of the phrase  
28 had divided into two camps, "one adopting a broad construction of  
the phrase and one adopting a narrow or strict interpretation.").

1 Those cases adopting a broad interpretation of the phrase have  
2 concluded that the phrase includes "any statement that has a  
3 bearing on the financial position of the debtor or an insider."  
4 Douglas v. Kosinski (In re Kosinski), 424 B.R. 599, 608-09 & n.8  
5 (1st Cir. BAP 2010). This includes any statement regarding "the  
6 status of a single asset or liability," Joelson, 427 F.3d at 705,  
7 as is the case here.

8 Those cases adopting a narrow or strict interpretation have  
9 concluded that the phrase includes "only statements providing  
10 information as to a debtor's net worth, overall financial health,  
11 or an equation of assets and liabilities." In re Kosinski, 424  
12 B.R. at 609.

13 The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has not expressly stated  
14 whether it interprets the controversial phrase broadly or  
15 narrowly. However, in at least one decision, it held that a  
16 debtor's statement regarding the value of and encumbrances  
17 against proposed collateral for a loan was not, by itself, a  
18 statement respecting the debtor's financial condition within the  
19 meaning of § 523(a)(2)(A): "For present purposes it is enough to  
20 point out that the statement we are considering did not purport  
21 to set forth the debtors' net worth or overall financial  
22 condition, so our analysis must revolve around 11 U.S.C.  
23 § 523(a)(2)(A)." In re Kirsh, 973 F.2d at 1457.

24 While Kirsh did not expressly state whether the phrase  
25 "statement respecting financial condition" should be interpreted  
26 broadly or narrowly in all contexts, it would be difficult if not  
27 impossible to reconcile Kirsh's specific holding with a broad  
28 interpretation of that phrase. Kirsh used language - "debtors'

1 net worth or overall financial condition" - which closely mirrors  
2 the language that the strict interpretation courts have used.  
3 Moreover, had Kirsh applied a broad interpretation, it likely  
4 would have concluded that the statement regarding the value of  
5 and encumbrances against the proposed collateral was a statement  
6 respecting the debtor's financial condition, as other broad  
7 interpretation courts have concluded, and reached a different  
8 result. See, e.g., Engler v. Van Steinburg (In re Van  
9 Steinburg), 744 F.2d 1060, 1061 (4th Cir. 1984); Beneficial Nat'l  
10 Bank v. Priestley (In re Priestley), 201 B.R. 875, 882 (Bankr. D.  
11 Del. 1996).

12 The most recent circuit-level opinion addressing the issue  
13 is In re Joelson, 427 F.3d at 700. After considering the  
14 language and structure of the Code, the legislative history  
15 leading up to the enactment of § 523(a)(2)(A) and (B), and the  
16 decisions of other courts, Joelson concluded that the phrase  
17 should be interpreted narrowly. Id. at 714. Joelson provides a  
18 good analytic framework for analyzing the issues in this case.

### 19 **1. Contextual Reading of Statute**

20 Joelson initially read § 523(a)(2)(A) in the context of the  
21 entire Code. Id. at 706-07. Although admitting, as it had to,  
22 that the Code does not define the phrase "respecting the  
23 debtor's . . . financial condition," the court observed that §  
24 101(32)'s definition of "insolvent" does use the phrase  
25 "financial condition," and uses it to describe the overall  
26 financial health of the debtor. As Joelson noted, "[t]he Code  
27 defines 'insolvent' as, inter alia, the 'financial condition such  
28 that the sum of [an] entity's debts is greater than all of such

1 entity's property ... exclusive of [certain types] of property.'"   
2 Id. at 706 (quoting 11 U.S.C. § 101(32)(A)) (emphasis in   
3 original). This usage of the "financial condition" phrase   
4 provides "tangential support" for a strict interpretation of the   
5 phrase "respecting the debtor's . . . financial condition." Id.

6 Joelson's second contextual argument is more to the point.   
7 The court noted that the Code treats financial condition   
8 misrepresentations very differently depending on whether these   
9 representations are oral or written. Id. at 707. As Joelson   
10 explained, this difference in treatment makes sense only to the   
11 extent Congress meant financial condition misrepresentations to   
12 refer to statements about one's overall financial position,   
13 rather than to statements about a specific asset or liability:

14 [I]t is logical to give more leeway (and more   
15 dischargeability) to a debtor who errs in stating his   
16 or her overall position orally, since it is more likely   
17 that he or she may have made a mistake inadvertently.   
18 It is also logical to give less leeway to a debtor who   
19 makes a specific oral misrepresentation as to a   
20 particular asset, because it is less likely that such a   
21 misrepresentation is inadvertent. By the same token,   
22 it is logical to give little leeway (and less   
23 dischargeability) under § 523(a)(2)(B) to a debtor who   
24 fraudulently misstates his or her overall financial   
25 position in writing, since such communications carry an   
26 air of formality that their oral counterparts do not   
27 and are typically made after more studied   
28 consideration.

22 Id.

23 Against this analysis, the court acknowledged that Congress   
24 intended § 523(a) to serve as a comprehensive scheme of   
25 exceptions to discharge to further the cornerstone policy   
26 embodied in the Bankruptcy Code "of affording relief only to the   
27 'honest but unfortunate debtor.'" Cohen v. De La Cruz, 523 U.S.   
28 213, 217 (1998) (quoting Grogan v. Garner, 498 U.S. 279, 287

1 (1991)). The broad interpretation of the financial condition  
2 phrase would expand the types of dishonestly incurred debts that  
3 could be discharged, in apparent contrast to the central  
4 principal favoring honest debtors.

## 5 **2. Legislative History**

6 Joelson next examined the legislative history leading up to  
7 enactment of § 523(a)(2)(A) and (B), mirroring in many respects  
8 the Supreme Court's detailed account of this same history in  
9 Field v. Mans, 516 U.S. 59 (1995). Both Field and Joelson  
10 explained that the origins of § 523(a)(2)(A) and (B) date back to  
11 the turn of the Twentieth Century. Field, 516 U.S. at 64-65;  
12 Joelson, 427 F.3d at 707-08. As of 1903, the precursor to  
13 § 523(a)(2)(A) provided for the nondischargeability of debts  
14 arising from any oral misrepresentation. Field, 516 U.S. at 65-  
15 66; Joelson, 427 F.3d at 708.

16 In 1903, Congress added the precursor to § 523(a)(2)(B).  
17 This section denied the debtor's discharge as to all of his or  
18 her debts to the extent he or she used a materially false written  
19 statement to obtain an extension of credit. Field, 516 U.S. at  
20 65; Joelson, 427 F.3d at 708. Notably, neither the debtor's  
21 deceptive intent nor the creditor's reliance were prerequisites  
22 to the denial of the debtor's discharge under this provision.  
23 Field, 516 U.S. at 65.

24 By 1960, it became apparent to Congress that some creditors  
25 were abusing the existing system by reaping a windfall at the  
26 expense of the debtor and other creditors. Joelson, 427 F.3d at  
27 708. These creditors were encouraging or otherwise inducing  
28 their borrowing clientele to issue less than complete and

1 accurate financial statements, thereby effectively enabling those  
2 creditors to render amounts owed to them bankruptcy-proof; such  
3 creditors later could coerce payment notwithstanding the filing  
4 of a bankruptcy by using previously-submitted inaccurate  
5 financial statements to raise the specter of the complete denial  
6 of the debtor's discharge. Id. Accordingly, in 1960 Congress  
7 amended the Bankruptcy Act to combine the precursor to  
8 § 523(a)(2)(B) with the precursor to § 523(a)(2)(A). Field, 516  
9 U.S. at 66 n.6; Joelson, 427 F.3d at 708.

10 To this combination Congress added intent and reliance  
11 requirements. Field, 516 U.S. at 66 n.6; Joelson, 427 F.3d at  
12 708.<sup>7</sup> As noted in Field:

13 Thus, as of 1960 the relevant portion of § 17(a)(2)  
14 provided that discharge would not release a bankrupt  
from debts that

15 are liabilities for obtaining money or  
16 property by false pretenses or false  
17 representations, or for obtaining money or  
18 property on credit or obtaining an extension  
19 or renewal of credit in reliance upon a  
20 materially false statement in writing  
respecting [the bankrupt's] financial  
condition made or published or caused to be  
made or published in any manner whatsoever  
with intent to deceive.

21 Field, 516 U.S. at 66 n.6 (quoting Act of July 12, 1960, Pub.L.  
22 86-621, 74 Stat. 409) (emphasis added).

23 The 1960 amendments did not provide for any divergent  
24

---

25 <sup>7</sup>As one commentator stated, "[t]his history of increasing  
26 limits placed on nondischargeability based on false statements  
27 respecting the debtor's financial condition indicates  
28 congressional intent to narrow the reach of Section  
523(a)(2)(B)." Frost, supra, at 5. The broad interpretation, of  
course, accomplishes the exact opposite result by bringing more  
misrepresentations within the ambit of § 523(a)(2)(B).

1 treatment of debts incurred through the use of false oral  
2 statements concerning a debtor's financial condition.  
3 Furthermore, the legislative history accompanying the 1960  
4 amendments made reasonably clear that the new phrase "materially  
5 false statement in writing respecting [the bankrupt's] financial  
6 condition" was meant to refer to formal written financial  
7 statements, by its repeated reference to "financial statements"  
8 when describing the purpose and effect of the revised statute.  
9 See Joelson, 427 F.3d at 708-09. Indeed, in reviewing this same  
10 legislative history, Field used interchangeably the phrases  
11 "financial statements," "written statement[s] of financial  
12 condition" and "statement[s] in writing respecting [the  
13 bankrupt's] financial condition" thereby suggesting that it  
14 viewed the meaning of these phrases as at least roughly  
15 synonymous. Field, 516 U.S. at 65-66.

16 The legislative history of the 1978 Code is silent on why  
17 the new statute expressly excepted oral statements respecting the  
18 debtor's financial condition from coverage under § 523(a)(2)(A).  
19 But as Joelson pointed out, this same legislative history  
20 reflected a general intent to maintain existing law, see Joelson,  
21 427 F.3d at 709, and not exempt a significant class of  
22 misrepresentations from the Code's scheme of nondischargeable  
23 debts. Id.

24 [T]here is no indication in the legislative history  
25 that Congress intended to remove from the coverage of  
26 § 523(a)(2)(A) any of the debts based on oral  
27 misrepresentations going to financial condition that  
28 had been within the coverage of that provision's  
predecessors.

Id.

1           The Revision Notes accompanying the 1978 enactment of the  
2 Bankruptcy Code support Joelson's account of the legislative  
3 history. Those Revision Notes state that § 523(a)(2) "is  
4 modified only slightly from current section 17(a)(2)." H.R. Rep.  
5 No. 95-595, at 364 (1977). The Revision Notes describe both the  
6 general coverage of § 523(a)(2) and the substantive changes from  
7 prior § 17(a)(2), and neither of those descriptions mention  
8 anything about § 523(a)(2)(A)'s new exception from coverage. In  
9 short, it would have been exceedingly odd for Congress to have  
10 made a significant change in the substantive law's coverage  
11 without even mentioning it in this context.

### 12           **3. Existing Case Law**

13           After making the same observations about Field as we make  
14 above, Joelson discussed the decisions of other courts that have  
15 chosen between the broad and narrow interpretation of the phrase  
16 "statement respecting the debtor's . . . financial condition."  
17 Joelson, 427 F.3d at 710-14; see also Skull Valley Band of  
18 Goshute Indians v. Chivers (In re Chivers), 275 B.R. 606, 614  
19 (Bankr. D. Utah 2002); Weiss v. Alicea (In re Alicea), 230 B.R.  
20 492, 502-04 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1999).

21           On the opposing side, the seminal decision opting for the  
22 broad approach is In re Van Steinburg, 744 F.2d at 1060-1061.  
23 Van Steinburg is very short, and so we easily can quote the full  
24 extent of its reasoning:

25           Concededly, a statement that one's assets are not  
26 encumbered is not a formal financial statement in the  
27 ordinary usage of that phrase. But Congress did not  
28 speak in terms of financial statements. Instead it  
referred to a much broader class of statements - those  
"respecting the debtor's . . . financial condition." A  
debtor's assertion that he owns certain property free

1 and clear of other liens is a statement respecting his  
2 financial condition. Indeed, whether his assets are  
3 encumbered may be the most significant information  
4 about his financial condition. Consequently, the  
5 statement must be in writing to bar the debtor's  
6 discharge.

7 Id. at 1061.

8 In our view, Van Steinberg and its progeny base their  
9 decision on an oversimplified version of plain-meaning analysis.  
10 Without considering the relationship of the phrase in question to  
11 the contextual statutory scheme or the logical impact of their  
12 broad interpretation on that scheme, they improperly emphasize  
13 one meaning of the words to the exclusion of all other  
14 considerations. See Corley v. United States, 129 S.Ct. 1558, 1567  
15 n.5 (2009).<sup>8</sup>

16 Based on the foregoing analysis, we hold that the phrase  
17 "statement respecting the debtor's . . . financial condition"  
18 should be narrowly interpreted. We agree with Joelson's  
19 conclusion that such statements "are those that purport to  
20 present a picture of the debtor's overall financial health."

---

21 <sup>8</sup> We acknowledge that some courts have rejected Joelson's  
22 approach in favor of Van Steinberg's. See, e.g., Jacobs v. Versa  
23 Corp. (In re Jacobs), 2011 WL 5313825, at \*\* 4-5 (Bankr. E.D.  
24 Mich. 2011); Material Prods. Int'l, Ltd. v. Ortiz (In re Ortiz),  
25 441 B.R. 73, 82-83 (Bankr. W.D. Tex. 2010). However, Van  
26 Steinberg and its progeny collectively bring into focus another  
27 concern that we have with the broad interpretation: that is, it  
28 is difficult to conceive of any false representation regarding an  
asset or a particular financial condition that could justifiably  
induce "an extension, renewal or refinancing of credit" that  
would not also be a "statement respecting the debtor's . . .  
financial condition" under the broad interpretation. And yet the  
plain language of § 523(a)(2) contemplates on its face the  
existence of such representations, even if the broad  
interpretation renders them all but inconceivable.

1 Joelson, 427 F.3d at 714. As Joelson put it:

2 Statements that present a picture of a debtor's overall  
3 financial health include those analogous to balance  
4 sheets, income statements, statements of changes in  
5 overall financial position, or income and debt  
6 statements that present the debtor or insider's net  
7 worth, overall financial health, or equation of assets  
8 and liabilities. . . . What is important is not the  
9 formality of the statement, but the information  
10 contained within it - information as to the debtor's or  
11 insider's overall net worth or overall income flow.

12 Id.<sup>9</sup>

13 In this appeal, the bankruptcy court never expressly stated  
14 whether it was applying a broad or narrow interpretation of the  
15 financial condition phrase. Nonetheless, the court's rulings  
16 granting all three of Belice's motions to dismiss, as described  
17 in the court's last order, are inconsistent with a narrow  
18 interpretation of the financial condition phrase. Moreover, the  
19 court's comments at the hearing on Belice's last motion to  
20 dismiss suggest that the court declined to follow Joelson.  
21 Shortly after Barnes argued that the court should follow both

---

22 <sup>9</sup> Two of our prior opinions, In re Barrack, 217 B.R. at  
23 598; and Medley v. Ellis (In re Medley), 214 B.R. 607 (9th Cir.  
24 BAP 1997), involved the issue of whether certain alleged  
25 misrepresentations qualified as statements respecting the  
26 debtor's financial condition within the meaning of § 523(a)(2)(A)  
27 and (B). But neither opinion decided the issue. Barrack  
28 accepted without any review the bankruptcy court's determination  
that the statements therein were "respecting the debtor's . . .  
financial condition" because the appellant did not challenge that  
determination on appeal. In re Barrack, 217 B.R. at 605.  
Meanwhile, in Medley, we acknowledged the controversy over the  
broad versus the narrow interpretation of the phrase "respecting  
the debtor's . . . financial condition," but we explained that we  
did not need to decide which interpretation to apply because at  
least some of the debtor's alleged misrepresentations would have  
qualified under either interpretation. In re Medley, 214 B.R. at  
612.



1 Belice had made the following misrepresentations:

- 2 a) Debtor's monthly salary as an attorney . . . was  
3 \$30,000;
- 4 b) Debtor had made a \$100,000 profit on the sale of his  
5 La Jolla residence in 2007;
- 6 c) Debtor was paying \$7,000 per month in rent which he  
7 could well afford;
- 8 d) Debtor was a San Diego Charger[sic] season ticket  
9 holder;
- 10 e) Debtor had purchased a \$28,000 diamond engagement  
11 ring in July 2007;
- 12 f) Debtor voluntarily left [his law firm] in late 2007  
13 because of more lucrative income in the luxury  
14 transportation sector (helicopter and jet service) and  
15 his involvement with a computer systems company;
- 16 g) The security for Plaintiff's loan would be a partial  
17 ownership interest in the BELICE-MEHTA PARTNERSHIP, an  
18 investor in an entertainment establishment in Macau,  
19 called the Monkey Bar;
- 20 h) The Monkey Bar was extremely successful, would  
21 likely be sold to the Sands Casino company in 2008, and  
22 would provide the Debtor with yet another revenue  
23 source; and
- 24 i) Debtor's interest in the BELICE-MEHTA PARTNERSHIP  
25 was worth far more than the loan from the Plaintiff to  
26 the Debtor.

27 Statements a, b, c and f relate to Belice's income and  
28 expenses, but they simply cannot be conceived as akin to any sort  
of complete or comprehensive statement of income and expenses.  
While these alleged misrepresentations reflect some aspects of  
Belice's historical income and expenses, they do not either  
separately or when taken together reflect his overall cash flow  
situation, his overall income and expenses, or the relative  
values and amounts of his assets and liabilities. Cf. Joelson,  
427 F.3d at 715 ("a statement about one part of Joelson's income

1 flow . . . does not reflect Joelson's overall financial  
2 health.").

3 Statements d, e, g, h and i relate to a handful of Belice's  
4 assets, but they do not reveal anything meaningful or  
5 comprehensive about his overall net worth. These statements do  
6 not purport to reflect all of Belice's assets, and they tell us  
7 nothing regarding his liabilities or any liens against any of his  
8 property. Cf. Id. at 714-15 (holding that statements regarding  
9 some of the assets that Joelson claimed to own did not constitute  
10 "a statement as to Joelson's overall financial health analogous  
11 to a balance sheet, income statement, statement of changes in  
12 financial position, or income and debt statement.").

13 Accordingly, under our interpretation of the financial  
14 condition phrase, Belice's alleged misrepresentations do not  
15 amount to a statement respecting his financial condition. At  
16 most, they are isolated representations regarding various items  
17 that might ultimately be included as assets in a balance sheet or  
18 in a statement of net worth. The bankruptcy court thus erred  
19 when it ruled that Barnes had not stated and could not state a  
20 claim for relief under § 523(a)(2)(A), and we must reverse.

### 21 **C. Fraudulent Omission**

22 In addition to Belice's affirmative representations, Barnes  
23 argued that Belice committed fraud by failing to disclose a  
24 significant liability. In particular, Barnes vigorously argues  
25 on appeal that, contrary to the bankruptcy court's ruling,  
26 Belice's alleged failure to disclose the \$530,000 Running Horse  
27 Liability was an actionable fraudulent omission.

28

1 A claim for relief based on a fraudulent omission must  
2 allege facts that, if proven, demonstrate that the defendant had  
3 a duty to disclose the omitted information. See Citibank (South  
4 Dakota), N.A. v. Eashai (In re Eashai), 87 F.3d 1082, 1089 (9th  
5 Cir. 1996) (stating that an omission can be fraudulent and  
6 actionable under § 523(a)(2)(A) when the debtor had a duty to  
7 disclose the omitted facts).

8 Section 551 of the Restatement (Second) of Torts provides in  
9 relevant part:

10 (2) One party to a business transaction is under a duty  
11 to exercise reasonable care to disclose to the other  
before the transaction is consummated,

12 \* \* \*

13 (b) matters known to him that he knows to be  
14 necessary to prevent his partial or ambiguous  
statement of the facts from being misleading;

15 . . . .

16 Id.<sup>10</sup> The comments accompanying Restatement § 551 explain the

---

17  
18 <sup>10</sup> We ordinarily look to the Restatement (Second) of Torts  
19 for guidance in determining what constitutes a fraudulent  
20 nondisclosure for purposes of § 523(a)(2)(A). See Apte v. Romesh  
21 Japra, M.D., F.A.C.C., Inc. (In re Apte), 96 F.3d 1319, 1324 (9th  
Cir. 1996); Tallant v. Kaufman (In re Tallant), 218 B.R. 58,  
64-65 (9th Cir. BAP 1998) (citing Field, 516 U.S. at 68-70).

22 The Restatement (Second) of Contracts also is instructive  
23 when, as here, the alleged misrepresentation arises in the  
context of contractual relations. The Restatement (Second) of  
Contracts provides in relevant part:

24 A person's non-disclosure of a fact known to him is  
25 equivalent to an assertion that the fact does not exist  
26 in the following cases only:

\* \* \*

27 (b) where he knows that disclosure of the fact  
28 would correct a mistake of the other party as to a

(continued...)

1 meaning of clause (b) as follows: “[a] statement that is partial  
2 or incomplete may be a misrepresentation because it is  
3 misleading, when it purports to tell the whole truth and does  
4 not.” Id. at cmt. g (emphasis added).

5 Barnes’ brief did not cite to any duty to disclose the  
6 Running Horse Liability. Barnes’ attorney could not point us to  
7 one when asked at oral argument. Without any such duty to  
8 disclose, no implied representation can be found in Belice’s  
9 silence. Without a false representation, there can be no fraud.  
10 The bankruptcy court was correct to accept Belice’s argument on  
11 this point.

12 **CONCLUSION**

13 For all of the foregoing reasons, the bankruptcy court’s  
14 order is REVERSED. This matter shall be REMANDED for further  
15 proceedings consistent with this opinion.

---

24 <sup>10</sup>(...continued)

25 basic assumption on which that party is making the  
26 contract and if non-disclosure of the fact amounts to a  
27 failure to act in good faith and in accordance with  
reasonable standards of fair dealing.

28 Restatement (Second) of Contracts § 161 (1981).