

MORAL PERCEPTION AND MORAL KNOWLEDGE

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This paper presents a theory of how perception provides a basis for moral knowledge. To do this, the paper sketches a theory of perception, explores the sense in which moral perception may deserve that name, and explains how certain moral properties may be perceptible. It does not presuppose a causal account of moral properties. If, however, they are not causal, how can we perceive, say, injustice? Can it be *observable* even if injustice is not a causal property? The paper answers these and other questions by developing an account of how moral properties, even if not causal, can figure in perception in a way that grounds moral knowledge.

Perception is essential for our knowledge of the world, and we normally trust its deliverances. If there is disagreement about, for instance, whether you are in an auditorium, my honestly saying I *see* you normally settles it. Touch is often even more trusted than sight. If we feel a bump on a smooth-looking table, we are confident that it is there even if looking closely yields an impression of perfect flatness. Many philosophers, however, think that moral knowledge is never perceptual and that perception is relevant to ethics only by representing certain non-moral ‘facts’. Responding to this sceptical view requires both an account of perception and an understanding of the basis of singular moral judgements.

I

Seeing Morality in Action. We can see a theft, hear a lie, and feel a stabbing. But can we also perceive the moral wrongs these acts may entail? We may say that we are relieved to see justice done, but is justice, as manifested in, say, equal treatment of citizens, perceptible to the senses? And can we take literally discourse that represents moral properties—or apparent moral properties—as perceptible?

We sometimes speak as if we have actually seen a moral property (or an instance of it). In answer to ‘Did you ever see him wrong

her?’ one could properly say ‘Yes, I saw him slap her face when she asked if he might drive home before having another whiskey.’ And could one not see terrible injustice in the beating of citizens peaceably criticizing their government? A natural response to such cases is that we do not see or in any sense perceive moral properties, but only non-moral properties or events that evidence their presence. Sceptics may contend that at best people simply perceive properties that naturally cause them to ascribe moral properties. Suppose this causal hypothesis is true. We must still ask what relations hold between the two sorts of properties and between non-moral and moral judgements. Second, do these relations differ importantly from relations common in non-moral cases? Third, if so, does the difference show that we do not acquire moral knowledge or moral justification through perceptions of the kinds I have illustrated? Answering requires establishing some basic points about perception.

II

The Modes and Forms of Perception. The paradigms of perception are experiences in the five ordinary sensory modes: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. We should not consider this list of perceptual modes exhaustive; but at least in philosophy, seeing is the favourite paradigm of perception, and, though I seek wide application for my points about perception, for convenience I use mainly visual examples. One liability of focusing on seeing is conflating perceptual with intellectual seeing. Seeing that Kant’s Humanity Formula embodies two different standards is an important kind of vision, but is not perceptual. The distinction may not be sharp, but it is clear enough to enable us to distinguish intellectual moral seeing from the apparent moral perceptions that concern us. We must also set aside seeing in the mind’s eye. That is best treated as a case of visual imagination.

Consider first three main cases of perceptual seeing: (1) seeing an object; (2) seeing an object to have a property, say seeing a face to be smiling; and (3) seeing that some ‘observational’ proposition holds, for instance that a face is tanned. I call these *simple perception*, *objectual perception* and *propositional perception*.¹ All three

¹ Here, and in discussing perception generally, I draw on Audi (2003, ch. 1).

cases manifest the veridicality—the ‘*factivity*’—of perception. If I see x , there *is* in fact an x that I see; this is *referential* factivity. If I see x to be blue, there is an x I see *and it is blue*; this also illustrates *predicative* factivity. And if I see *that* x is blue, that proposition is true; this is *propositional* factivity. Normally, I also *know* the proposition in question. These truths are apparently conceptual. Granted, someone may be said to ‘see ghosts’, but such uses normally indicate ascriptions of visual experience without an external object, and may be set aside here.

Seeing *as* also needs comment. This is a hybrid: in perceptual cases, it is veridical and referential as to what is seen, but neither necessarily veridical nor referentially transparent as to what is, as it were, visually predicated. A child’s seeing a stuffed hound as a lion entails that there *is* a stuffed hound seen, but not that a lion is seen; and someone who sees a table top as circular need not see it as having the shape of a figure whose circumference is π times its diameter, even if these properties are necessarily co-referential. The position of the expression following ‘*as*’, then, is neither necessarily factive nor referentially transparent. (This obviously applies where ‘seeing *as*’ is cognitive rather than perspectival, but our subject is perceptual rather than intellective, e.g. doxastic, seeing *as*.) In part because seeing *as* does not meet the factivity standard applicable to objectual and propositional seeing, I will not discuss it in relation to moral perception. The three factive cases are also more important for the epistemology of perception. Let us now look more closely at its metaphysics.

III

The Metaphysics of Perception: Its Structure and Elements. I begin with phenomenology. Perception is experiential. To see (or have some other perception) is to experience something, and the experience is distinctively qualitative. There is something it is *like* to see a maple tree in full foliage and something it is like to feel its leaves; and here ‘*like*’ has its phenomenal, not its comparative, sense. Doubtless there can be ‘blind sight’, understood as a ‘direct’ cognitive response to visible properties unaccompanied by relevant visual experience. But a person incapable of visual experience could have that; even a mechanical robot could, if it could have knowledge at

all. We need not call either kind of knowledge seeing. Not all knowledge of the visible is *visual knowledge*.

Perception is also in *some* sense ‘representational’. If it is indeed factive in the way illustrated—implying certain truths—the natural assumption would be that it represents its object: the thing that is, for example, seen and seen to have some property. The perceiver may also see *that* it has a property. Perceptual representationality is confirmed by the functional dependence—a kind of *discriminative dependence*—of the phenomenal element on the object perceived. Normally, if the tree I see is windblown, my visual impression varies with the waving of its branches; if I am perceptually conscious of my chair and it vibrates with a passing train, I have a tactile sense of vibrations; in thickening smoke, my olfactory sensations intensify; and so forth. This does not imply that we see observable properties of objects by *seeing* corresponding phenomenal properties; the relevant implication is that seeing the former entails *instantiating* certain of the latter.

Given the representationality of perception and the typically rich information it provides, it has become common to speak of perceptual content. This terminology needs clarification. If you see a squirrel, is the animal itself the content of your experience, or is that content simply a representation of the animal? Are the properties you see it to have the content? Does the proposition that there is a squirrel in the maple tree (if you see that this is so) belong to the content? Are all of these elements together the content? More plausibly, we might say that all the properties phenomenally represented in a perceptual experience constitute its content. We need names. Loosely speaking, we might call the perceived object the *objectual content*—this would be a kind of external content but, being ‘in’ the experience, might be considered a kind of content. Call the phenomenally represented properties the *property content*, and call the property-ascriptive propositions the perceiver can perceptually know on the basis of the perception the *total propositional content*. It will be the property content of moral perception that most concerns us.

This is a good place to consider the incalculably influential adage ‘Seeing is believing’. Look at your hand: do you believe that it has more than two-and-a-half fingers? Well, you could see that it does even before I asked. Mustn’t you ‘believe your eyes’? Now, for *every* property in the manual part of your visual field, you might be

thought to believe that the hand has that property: being open, broad, etc. This idea might underlie, and might seem to support, the view that the content of a visual experience includes beliefs of all the propositions ascribing the visually represented properties (at least all such propositions one can understand).

This idea is surely mistaken. You need not believe—before I mention the point—that your hand has more than two-and-a-half fingers, even if you see its five fingers. By virtue of seeing the five-fingered hand, you are, however, *disposed* to believe this if the matter comes up, as where someone has said she thought an accident mangled that hand. I contend that it is only under certain conditions that seeing entails (propositional) believing. Apparently, it is mainly where what is seen has some significance for the perceiver that seeing a property of the thing often produces the corresponding property-ascriptive belief.²

Granted, one could, on seeing a normal, five-fingered hand, believe *it* to be five-fingered without believing a *proposition* to the effect that *the hand* is five-fingered. Consider a play in which, though one *is* seeing a hand, one thinks it a plaster imitation. It also seems that we can *respond* to a property of something, such as an obstacle in our path—and we can *take* it to have a property—without *believing* it to have that property: discriminating the property may be enough to guide our steps so that we do not trip.³ I doubt that perception can guide behaviour *only* through producing guiding beliefs.

These points may be generalized to other perceptual modes. First, we cannot properly understand perception if we over-intellectualize it in the way that, perhaps partly because of misunderstanding ‘seeing is *believing*’, is natural for many philosophers. Second, it is crucial for understanding both belief—including moral belief—and its justification that we see how experience, especially perceptual experience, can justify belief or render it knowledge. Believing that this paper is white is justified by my visual experience of white or (arguably) my *seeing* its whiteness. *Saying* that I see this, as some would in justifying this belief, self-ascribes this experience and thereby suffices to express my justification; but the self-ascription of *seeing* its

² For a case supporting this distinction, see Audi (1994).

³ The points made here are supported in Audi (2007), esp. pp. 230–39, which replies to Williamson (2007).

whiteness or of seeing *that* it is white misleadingly suggests that I must believe that *I see* its whiteness in order to be justified in believing simply *that it is white*.

My stress on the discriminative dependence of phenomenal perceptual representations on the object perceived should make it evident that I regard perception as (or at least as embodying) a causal relation. I am suggesting a causal theory of perception on which to perceive something is, in outline, for it to produce or sustain, in the right way, an appropriate phenomenal representation of it. I refer to *non-hallucinatory* experience; but even hallucinations may have representational content, though, for non-sense-datum theorists, not objectual content. In my terminology, even if a hallucination of an object is so vivid as to be phenomenally indistinguishable from perceiving it, it is only a *sensory* experience, not a perceptual one: there is nothing seen, heard, etc.⁴

IV

The Grounds of Veridical Perception. Seeing three-dimensional objects is a good example for a reason not yet apparent. Let me, then, indicate some of its core elements.

First, we never (directly) see all of an object such as a tree, animal, or building; we see only the part facing us. On the most intuitive account, we see objects in virtue of seeing certain of their properties, such as (even if distortedly) their shape. Second, no inference is required: the objectual seeing is constituted by seeing the appropriate properties; it is not a case of, or dependent on, inferring, from propositions about the object, that it is (say) flat.

To be sure, suppose that ‘seen’ properties like the ellipticality that round discs, when viewed from an angle, appear to have are not properties those perceptible objects ever have. Then, talk of seeing the properties of objects must sometimes be understood in terms of awareness of properties that, in some appropriate way, represent the properties of the object seen. There is of course a physical property of ellipticality, and we can understand how a phenomenally visual awareness of it can, under the right conditions, represent to the

⁴ For valuable discussion of perceptual representation different from, but in some ways supportive of, mine, see McBrayer (forthcoming).

viewer the shape of a round disc. Sensing elliptically, however—as is normal in viewing a round disc from a sharp angle—is plainly not a property of round discs; nor does it entail a sense-datum's representing them. It is a higher-order property of persons that they have by virtue of being sensorily aware of the property of ellipticality. Granted, one might never have that awareness if one has *never* seen an elliptical object; but the possibility of hallucination apparently shows that sensory awareness of ellipticality—a phenomenal as distinct from perceptual awareness of it—does not entail simultaneous awareness of any object possessing it.

The kind of awareness of properties so far considered—perceptual as opposed to intellective awareness—is phenomenal. Perceptual awareness of properties, moreover, may require that instances of them play a causal role; but if so, what of hallucinations? Since hallucinations can occur when the sense in question receives no external stimuli (as where someone who has lost sight visually hallucinates a loved one) an adequate account of sensory experience should avoid taking it to contain an external object that is in some attenuated or abnormal way perceived. Here it is important to realize that what we are aware of can be abstract. There appear, then, to be at least two kinds of awareness of properties, intellective and phenomenal, and normally the former requires a route through the latter and in some cases may have a phenomenal element. Intellective awareness is not my concern here; but it is the conceptual kind that, on the epistemology I find most plausible, apparently underlies a priori knowledge.⁵

Suppose, however, that we regard the objects of the most basic kind of perception as the sorts of physical properties by which we see spatio-temporal things. Those things themselves are plausibly taken to be seen by virtue of seeing their properties. How, then, can we maintain that perception is a causal relation to the object perceived? This object, after all, is what causes the perceptual experience; the cause is not something abstract, such as a property.

We now face the difficult question of how to characterize the terms of the relevant causal relations. I begin with an important datum. To say that a stone caused a car's dent means something like this: the event of the stone's hitting the car dented it. The problem

⁵ A sketch of the associated account of the a priori and references to alternative views is provided in Audi (2008).

here for a causal theory of perception is to explain what causes perceptual experiences. Many are not events, but ongoing impressions. A natural account arises from analysis of event-causation and sustaining causation. My now seeing a hand is causally sustained by the hand's having the observable property of being five-fingered, up-raised, and so on for its properties I see. With momentary perceptions, such as seeing a light go out, the perceptual object's changing causes an event of, say, glimpsing its change. Thus, if I turn my hand, that event causes my seeing its turning, which is a partly phenomenal event. Simply seeing a flagpole's standing still as I watch it is also phenomenal but, when such seeing is static and does not entail change, it is not an event.

The metaphysical problem here is to explicate what kinds of objects are designated by the noun phrases naturally used in the relevant cases, for instance 'my hand's turning' and 'the flagpole's standing still'. We immediately encounter ambiguity: such phrases can designate types or tokens. If I turn my hand twice, there are two tokens of the type, turning my hand. The type is abstract and hence the wrong kind of thing to be a cause. But the token is what might be called a *dependent particular*: a particular because it is a unique thing in time and, at least for physical events, space; dependent because there must be an object that instantiates the property of turning (and, for at least event properties, *tokens* it). Ontologically, the hand is more basic than its turning: the hand can exist without turning, but not conversely.

Connecting this ontological point about events with the causal theory of perception yields the view that what causes our perceiving a substance is its instantiating some suitable set of properties, commonly including at least one observable property, such as a colour or shape property.⁶ Unless the perception is strictly momentary, there will be both event-causation and sustaining causation: even for my seeing my hand steadily, there is an event of my *starting* to see it, followed by my continuing to see it. That state is sustained by the diachronic instantiations of the relevant manual properties; those instantiations' sustaining my seeing it is a causal relation.

To see an object, then, is to see some suitable subset of properties

⁶ One might wonder how the causative property could fail to be observable; but the causative token need not be observable, as opposed to intimately connected with an observable property as, for instance, tokening light ray reflection is intimately connected (but not identical) with having a colour.

of it,⁷ which is a matter of an appropriate causal relation between its instantiating such properties and our phenomenal awareness of them: that is, a phenomenal instantiation of certain phenomenal properties—a kind of representation—of the visible properties in question. This is of course a realist theory of perception. It may seem an indirect realism, but it is as direct as a plausible realism can be. There is no more direct way to see a physical object than by seeing its properties. We could say that perception is mediated by awareness of properties, but this is misleading: the properties are not intermediary concrete objects, like sense-data. The only concrete objects—as opposed to properties—posited by the account are the perceiver and the thing perceived. The property instantiations are constituents in the perceptual relation itself and, ontologically, they are built from universals and the perceptible particulars that instantiate them.

V

Moral Perception as a Special Case. How well can the theory of perception just sketched accommodate moral perception? Moral perception is not an exact analogue of physical perception, at least of perceiving everyday visible objects seen in normal light. First, moral properties are not easily conceived as observable, in what seems the most elementary way: no sensory phenomenal representation is possible for them, as opposed to *intellective* representations, though these may be integrated with phenomenal elements.⁸ Second, even the perceptible properties on which the possession of moral properties is based may not be strictly speaking observable, at least in this elementary way. You can see *A* do an injustice to *B* by, for example, witnessing *A*'s stealing from *B* or *A*'s falsely accusing *B* of theft. But arguably, what is observable is *A*'s removal of (say) a bracelet or the

⁷ The property might be relational: I can see a distant plane when I misperceive its colour and shape but I see its approximate location and its relation to me produces a suitable phenomenal responsiveness to changes in it. I must here ignore these and other complications.

⁸ Compare, however, Mark Wynne's characterization of 'the perception of value': see especially Wynne (2005, ch. 3). He seems to agree with John McDowell that 'we should think of values as "in the world" ... on McDowell's account, it is by way of our affective responses that we come to recognize these values' (Wynne 2005, p. 9). The reference is to McDowell (1981). Cf. the passages Wynne quotes from Quentin Smith and Friederich Schleiermacher (Wynne 2005, pp. 64 and 66).

audible action of falsely accusing—indeed, you might count *A*'s false accusation of theft among the 'observable facts'—because you see and hear the accusatory speech act and you know the accusation is false. Still, even if you can see the basis of the falsity, such as, rolled into the accuser's hand, the money the accused is said to have stolen, your seeing the injustice depends on your understanding the significance of the discrepancy between this sight and the content of the accusation (at least where you also see it *as* unjust).

Does one, then, in any sense *see* injustice observationally? Or is such moral perception seeing, in a way that is at least not narrowly observational, a set of 'base properties' for injustice—that is, seeing properties on which injustice is consequential in a way that makes it obvious that an injustice is done, where one sees both *that* injustice is done and sees the deed *as* unjust? Similarly, suppose a supervisor writes 'two hours' for an employee's work rather than 'three hours', which we know is correct. Do we, in virtue of observing the falsification, see an injustice? We may speak of moral perception here, but it is not the elementary kind of perception illustrated by seeing the shape of a drinking glass.

Does moral perception, however, differ in kind from every sort of non-moral perception? One might think that the phenomenal elements in perception properly so called must be sensory in the representational way that goes with paradigms of seeing and some of the other four ordinary senses. But could there be, for instance, a phenomenal sense of injustice that is not 'pictorial' in the way the visual impression of a tree is? Must perceptual experience be cartographic, embodying a 'mapping' from phenomenal properties, such as visualizing squares in a painting, to properties of the object perceived? If this is necessary—and even olfactory, gustatory, and perhaps auditory, perception argue that it is not—then although, for certain cases of injustice, we can perhaps find a mapping, for the concrete deed seen to be unjust, from the perceptual sense of injustice to certain of the *base* properties of injustice, there is no phenomenal property that has a cartographic representational relation to the property of injustice itself.

Suppose, however, that we distinguish between a phenomenal—and, especially, a cartographic—representation of injustice and a phenomenal representation constituted by a (richer) *response* to injustice. The sense of injustice, then, *as* based on, and phenomenally integrated with, a suitable ordinary perception of the properties on

which injustice is consequential, might serve as the experiential element in moral perception.⁹ Compare seeing an angry outburst that evokes the comment 'I've never seen such anger!' Shall we say that the anger is not perceived because it is seen through what might be called constitutive manifestations of it? Granted, these can be mimicked by a good actor; but the façade of a house may conceal empty space behind. We should not conclude that houses are never seen. Why, then, may some injustices not be as perceptible as anger?

Granted, whereas someone perceptually normal cannot ordinarily view a tree in good light without the usual arboreal representational experience, many who are morally normal can view an injustice without the sense of injustice or any moral phenomenal response, such as an intuitive sense of injustice. But injustice can be subtle, and this difference may trace to the need for greater moral sensitivity than goes with mere moral normality. Compare seeing a painting in which a small figure of a person is sketched visibly but is not sharply distinct from background shrubbery. Someone who is perceptually normal but not an experienced viewer of paintings might not, without careful scrutiny or guidance, have any phenomenal response representing that figure. This does not imply that the figure is visually imperceptible, and the absence of a sense of injustice upon witnessing an unjust deed does not imply that its injustice is morally imperceptible.¹⁰

It should be apparent, then, that the theory of perception I have outlined can accommodate moral perception by incorporating a distinction between perceptual representations of an ordinary sensory kind and perceptual representation of a richer kind. Can this broad theory of perception, however, explain how moral perception can have a causal character? It can. It does not do so by treating (moral)

⁹ Compare Jonathan Dancy: '[T]hough we can discern reasons across the board, our ability to do it is not sensory; it is not sensibility that issues in the recognition of reasons (though sensibility may be required along the way); it is rather our capacity to judge ... We might, I suppose, conceive judgement in general as a *response* to recognized reasons ...' (Dancy 2004, p. 144). This seems consistent with my view; and if recognizing reasons can be accomplished by discriminating base properties for a moral property central in a judgement, then if, as I hold, some cases of recognition are integrated with a certain phenomenology and an understanding of the relevant moral concepts, my view of moral perception (simple and propositional) accommodates the conception of certain (prima facie) moral judgements sketched here.

¹⁰ The view proposed is consistent with my ethical intuitionism developed in Audi (2004) and elsewhere; and this paragraph indicates how to meet an objection by Sarah McGrath to the idea that there is intuitive knowledge (not all of which, to be sure, is perceptual) of particular moral facts. See McGrath (2004, esp. p. 223).

perceptual property instances like seeing injustice as causally produced or sustained by grounds of moral properties. The theory is neutral regarding the possibility that moral properties are causal. It does, however, construe seeing certain subsets of base properties for injustice as—at least given appropriate understanding of their connection to moral properties—a kind of perception of a moral property; and this kind includes as elements such ordinary perceptions as seeing a seizure of an old man's wallet and hearing an abusive vulgarity screamed at a conference speaker. Given our psychological constitution, we may normally be unable to witness these things without a phenomenal sense of wrongdoing integrated with our perceptual representation of the wrong-making facts.¹¹ Certain perceptions of moral wrongs are virtually irresistible.

Moreover, though moral perception is not belief-entailing, given how we see certain base properties sufficient for injustice, we sometimes perceptually know, and are perceptually warranted in believing, that, for instance, one person is doing an injustice to another (thus warranted in seeing the deed *as* an injustice). When we have such perceptual knowledge or warrant, we are often properly describable as *seeing that* the first is doing an injustice to the second and, indeed, as knowing this. This point does not imply that seeing *an injustice* is intrinsically conceptual; but seeing *that* an injustice is done is conceptual. A child who has yet to develop the concept of injustice can see an act that constitutes an injustice. The same perception a few years later might immediately yield a moral conceptualization of the act or indeed moral knowledge thereof.

My view does not imply that *all* non-inferential moral knowledge of perceptible moral facts is itself perceptual. One might know such facts from memory or testimony. Conceivably, there could even be a subliminal detection capacity by which someone non-inferentially knows some such facts more directly. An experience constituting a moral perception, by contrast, must have a phenomenal element. This might be called a *perceptual moral seeming*. This is not equivalent to an *intuitive moral seeming*, nor need the proposition known be itself *intuitive*. It may well be, however, that some perceptual moral seemings are related to intuitive seemings based on a hypothetical version of the same case much as perceptual physical seem-

¹¹ For related work developing a partial phenomenology of moral perception, see Horgan and Timmons (2008). They also explore phenomenological aspects of fittingness.

ings are related to an imaginational seeing of the same object in the mind's eye. Responsiveness to property instantiations is crucial in both cases.

Nothing said here implies that what perceptually seems to have a property actually has it, nor need every perceptual or intuitive seeming yield belief of some proposition it supports. A perceptually knowable proposition may be only a *potential* object of an intuitive seeming, as where someone senses a wrong and considers the nature of the deed but does not initially see that it is wrong. Moral perceptual seemings, moreover, may or may not be partly emotional, as where indignation figures in them.

Some philosophers might contend that we see that (say) someone is writing 'He did only two hours of work', but cannot see that an injustice was done; we *infer* that from what we visually know and background propositions we already believe. I grant that making such inferences is possible and that 'see that' can designate inferential cognitions, as where 'see' means 'realize'. Such cases represent an inferential kind of knowledge that rests on a perceptual base. My point is that for some moral knowledge, we need not posit an inference, as opposed to a kind of belief-formation that is a response to a recognized pattern. An inference, as a tokening of an argument, is a mental event or process that requires a set of premisses and a conclusion. Inference is not needed for responses to patterns nor even for certain kinds of interpretation, as where an outburst is interpreted as frustration rather than anger.¹²

The relation between moral perception and inference deserves further comment. Suppose we do posit an inference where moral knowledge is, on my view, perceptual. We must then treat as inferential all our perceptual beliefs except the most elementary. We could not be properly said to see that someone is angry or that water is coming from the tap. Positing inferences is not needed to account for how perceiving a pattern can mediate between perceptions of the elements in it and a belief the pattern produces. Compare facial recognition. We believe that someone approaching is (say) Karl because of the facial pattern we see, but seeing that is a matter of seeing many details, not of drawing on myriad tacit premisses attributing them.

Even if propositional moral perceptions were in some sense infer-

¹² Audi (2004) addresses the role of inference in moral epistemology; and in Audi (2006), especially chapters 4–6, I provide an account of the nature of inference and its relation to belief formation.

ential, objectual ones need not be. Just as we can see a plant to be a tree without inferring that it is one, we can see an act to be a wrong without inferring that it is such. In seeing one person intimidate another we may have a phenomenal sense of the first wronging the second but only on reflection form a *belief* in which the concept of wrongness (or any moral concept) figures. Similarly, imagine hearing a judge issuing a sentence. We may have a sense of its unfittingness to the crime prior to our forming—or without our forming—a belief, on that basis, that the sentence is unjust. To be sure, the phenomenal representation of voicing and diction may be psychologically so much more prominent than the moral sense of injustice that the latter is difficult to isolate and easy to miss, especially where it is not emotional. But the visual sensations representing a sad face may be similarly subtle. They may still be a basis for a perceptual belief about the person's mood, whether or not emotion figures in the perceiver's phenomenal response.

One might think that accounting for moral perception requires naturalizing moral properties so that they can figure in the causal order as do the observable properties familiar in the natural sciences. I am not seeking to naturalize moral properties, nor does explaining the data require such naturalistic assimilationism.¹³ At least three points are needed here. First, I grant that the experiential responses to moral properties that entitle us to speak of moral perception are causally explainable in terms of a basis in the natural properties on which moral properties are consequential. Second, this is possible whether or not moral properties are themselves causal. Third, the question whether moral perception—or any other kind—can be somehow inferential is orthogonal to the question whether only natural properties are perceptible.

In one way, I am (non-reductively) naturalizing moral perception. For I not only take moral perception to be a causal relation, but grant that the base properties for moral properties are natural and have causal power if any properties do. The non-causal element in moral perception and in knowledge acquired through moral perception belongs to conceptual capacities that go with an adequate understanding of moral concepts and with the a priori character of the relation between moral properties and the non-moral, natural ones

¹³ For critical discussion of Nicholas Sturgeon's 'Cornell Realist' attempt to naturalize moral properties, see Audi (1993). That paper argues that naturalizing moral explanations is possible without naturalizing moral properties.

on which they are consequential. The experience in virtue of which a moral perception counts as a perception is causally grounded in perception of natural properties, and it may be considered a causally grounded response to a moral property even if the phenomenal element in that response is not narrowly representational.¹⁴

My conclusion at this point, then, is that although moral properties are apparently not natural properties, they are constitutively anchored in natural properties, in an intimate way such that seeing or otherwise perceiving the natural properties or relations that are their base suffices, given an appropriate phenomenal response, to make it reasonable to describe certain experiences as perceptions of such moral properties as injustice or wrongdoing. When moral perceptions like these occur, whether they are simple or objectual, the perceiver is in a position to see that something, such as an action or person, has the property in question. Such propositional perception embodies a kind of moral knowledge.

VI

The Epistemology of Moral Perception. If we recall cases like facial recognition, in which we acquire perceptual knowledge of a property *by* perceiving other properties (though non-inferentially), we can distinguish between *basic* and *non-basic perception*. Perception of the shape and colour properties of William's face is basic relative to perception of the property of being—as we might put it—'William-faced', but we do not normally infer that the face is William's from ascriptions of the more basic properties. The relation of the base properties to moral properties is at least as intimate as that of facially constitutive properties to that of having the face in question, and more intimate than that of anger-expressive properties to being angry. I see no good reason not to speak of moral perception if we can speak of facial perception and perception of anger.

Regarding the epistemology of moral perception generally, I have argued that there is a kind of experience properly called moral perception and that it can ground a certain kind of moral knowledge. Even apart from scepticism (which I here assume is avoidable), we

¹⁴ Space does not permit comparing this view with moral sense theories, but I take those to be best understood as naturalizing moral properties and making them response-dependent; I do neither. For a version of this view usefully contrasting with mine, see Smith (2004).

should ask whether the grounding of the moral-perceptual beliefs in question is sufficiently reliable to qualify them as knowledge.

It must be granted that if we do not have good grounds for believing that the base properties are present, then we do not have good grounds for ascribing a moral property. This kind of dependency, however, is not peculiar to moral ascriptions. If we lack grounds for believing Jim is red-faced and screaming as he hears of his son's wrecking the car, we also lack good grounds for believing, on that basis, that he is angry. But notice this: although his having these properties is excellent evidence that he is angry, it does not entail that proposition, whereas *A*'s knowingly hiding the money *A* is falsely accusing *B* of stealing does (non-formally) entail that *A* is (prima facie) wronging *B*. In the first case, the grounding relation is empirical and contingent; in the second, it is a priori and necessary.¹⁵ Moreover, although in the first case we perceive a fact by what *it determines* and, in the second, by what *determines it*, in both the perceptual knowledge is reliably grounded by virtue of a causal relation.

My position, then, is that moral cognitions, such as moral judgments, can constitute perceptual knowledge but are epistemically, though not inferentially, dependent on non-moral elements. Take inferential dependence first. Suppose we know or justifiedly believe that a student plagiarized. This is because we know or justifiedly believe that, for instance, the paper is copied from the internet (this would illustrate both epistemic and inferential dependence). If, however, we know *perceptually* that a man wronged his wife by seeing him slap her face upon her asking him not to have another whiskey, we know this non-inferentially, on the basis of our adequate perceptual grounds. Our need for this basis manifests an epistemic dependence, but not an inferential, premiss-dependence: our grounds are perceptual, not propositional.

Our justification is also perceptual: we see him slap her and, as with facial recognition, believe, on that visual basis and non-inferentially, that he wronged her. Our justification for this perceptual belief is as strong as we would have for believing this non-perceptually, on the basis of premisses ascribing to him the basis of the property (wronging her) whose instantiation we have directly witnessed.

¹⁵ That the relation between the base properties and the moral ones consequential on them is necessary and a priori is argued in chapters 1 and 2 of Audi (2004), but this paper does not depend on that strong view.

The belief can count as perceptual knowledge because of the way it is based on a phenomenal responsiveness to the moral property. That responsiveness, in turn, is causally grounded in perception of certain of the natural properties on which the moral property is consequential.

The position on perceptual moral knowledge defended here—broadly a *phenomenological reliabilism*—is sufficient (even if not necessary) to ground the possibility of a major kind of ethical objectivity: it accounts for the availability of intersubjectively accessible grounds for a wide range of moral judgements.¹⁶ It also explains how moral knowledge can meet strong reliabilist constraints. The position does not imply, however, that all non-perceptual moral knowledge rests on a foundation of perceptual moral knowledge, or even that we could not have the former without the latter. The account is consistent with the view that, without our having some perceptual moral knowledge, we would have no moral knowledge; but it leaves open the possibility that even apart from moral perception, we have both inferential and non-inferential moral knowledge and justification for moral judgements.

If there is a kind of moral perception that makes ethical objectivity possible, why is there so much apparently rational moral disagreement? One would think that given the kind of intuitive a priori connection I take to hold between certain perceptible properties and moral properties consequential on them, there would be fewer moral disagreements or, where such disagreement occurs between rational persons, resolution would be less difficult. How moral disagreement is to be understood on the theory I am developing cannot be explained in detail here, but consider four pertinent points. First, just as quite rational persons differ in aesthetic and even perceptual sensitivity, they differ in moral sensitivity and may disagree as a result, even where they witness the same morally right or wrong actions. Second, much moral disagreement centres on propositions the disputants believe inferentially, and the parties may differ in

¹⁶ My reliabilism here concerns conditions for knowledge, not perception: it is not implied that we *perceive* something only given a 'reliable' connection between its having, in the circumstances, the relevant properties and our perceiving it (though this connection cannot be, in a certain way, accidental).

their standards for sound inference, as indeed scientists may in theirs. Third, even apart from these points, rarely do parties to a moral disagreement respond to identical evidences (e.g. the same non-moral facts about well-being). Fourth, it is difficult to determine just what facts are relevant in the first place. Moral disagreement among rational persons, even where each is in some way responding perceptually to the same phenomena, does not show that there is no moral perception or that moral perception cannot often be a basis of knowledge. If it can be, then at least some moral judgements may be objectively grounded and, as may be increasingly important in our globalized world, a basis for cross-cultural agreement.¹⁷

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