

THESIS

“MORAL PERCEPTION”: AN EXAMINATION AND REVISION

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Tyler L. Will

Department of Philosophy

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Elizabeth Tropman

Matthew D. MacKenzie
Patrick Plaisance

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ABSTRACT

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In the recent metaethics literature, some theorists have advanced what seems to be a novel moral epistemology or explanation of how it is that agents come to form moral beliefs and acquire moral knowledge. Known to this point simply as “moral perception,” this view claims that it is possible to “perceive” moral facts in much the same way that agents routinely perceive properties such as color, size, or shape. For the moral perceptionist, it is plausible to think that one may “see” when an injustice has been committed or “hear” some immorality in a genuine and robust sense. In this thesis, I consider the coherence and prospects of “moral perception” as a candidate moral epistemology and conclude that it is effectively interchangeable with some more established—if frequently misunderstood—varieties of moral intuitionism.

In chapter 1, I take up and examine recent characterizations of moral perception in the literature. As I make clear below, there is no single account of this position, and consequently the first chapter represents an interpretation—admittedly one of many possible—of what has been styled as moral perception. These soundings in the literature are necessarily selective, and I emphasize that moral perception epistemologies seem to be motivated by three core claims. Supporters of moral perception epistemologies seem led to argue that moral properties can be represented in perception, that such cases have distinctive moral phenomenologies, and that an agent’s perception and awareness of such properties is non-inferential. I pursue each of the claims in turn and demonstrate how they may help to give some needed definition to and help to effectively delimit the idea of a moral perception.

With the interpretive account of moral perception in hand, chapter 2 assesses the prospects of moral perception epistemologies going forward. My principal argument is that despite its initial promise, moral perception theories may fail to provide a unique account of moral knowledge. By emphasizing the directness, immediacy, and non-inferentiality of moral beliefs, moral perceptionists advance an epistemology that bears important similarities to many articulations of moral intuitionism. I dedicate chapter 2 to explicating these many points of overlap between moral perceptions and intuitions. In view of these many similarities, I contend that the moral perception may in fact be best defended as a particular form of intuitionism. I attempt to make good on this claim by advancing a provisional form of appearance intuitionism which I argue offers a form of moral perception view in all but name.

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While it is my name alone that marks the title page of this thesis, it is, of course, a work with many debts and influences. I would like to thank chiefly my advisor Dr. Elizabeth Tropman who first awoke and has since helped to sustain my interest in metaethics and problems of moral epistemology. I follow her example—and even some of her conclusions—in the pages below. She has saved me from numerous unclarities and missteps in the drafting of this document and the development of its central argument. Any remaining faults are mine. I must also recognize Dr. Matthew MacKenzie with whom I exchanged several ideas and complaints that were the genesis of this project. While I will never attain Dr. MacKenzie's clear and concise style, quite a few of his comments have shaped my own decisions in matters of both substance and expression. Final thanks must be paid to my fellow graduate students Stephanie Hoffman, Saad Baradan, John Davis, and Matt Gustafson for our many conversations—therapeutic and philosophical—on topics related to this thesis. They have been true colleagues and fellow wayfarers on the otherwise lonely road of academic philosophy.

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INTRODUCTION: MOTIVATING MORAL PERCEPTION

Moral realism is often thought to have a credibility problem. According to the moral realist, ethical descriptors such as moral or immoral refer to real facts or properties that are part of the world just as scientific or mathematical properties are part of the fabric of reality. For many moral realists, moral facts are further said to be objective in the sense that they exist and have their own characteristics irrespective of our thoughts or feelings about them.¹ A judgment such as “incest is immoral,” the realist argues, not only makes a claim about some genuine moral fact, this fact would obtain even if some future culture began to celebrate incest as virtuous. By pointing to this range of mind-independent moral facts, however, the moral realist invites obvious and difficult questions about our moral knowledge: If moral properties are mind-independent, how do we know about them? How can we judge when a particular act is wrong or right? According to some skeptics, moral realism is implausible because it lacks a credible moral epistemology that could provide answers to such questions. J.L. Mackie, for example, argued famously that the realist cannot provide a satisfactory account of moral knowledge and must resort instead to some mysterious or special moral faculty.² Even decades after Mackie, realists face continued pressure to develop a compelling account of moral belief.

What has been called “moral perception” has emerged in the recent metaethics literature as an epistemological theory that may provide convincing answers to questions about the nature and sources of our moral knowledge. Advocates of the moral perception view (hereafter MP) maintain that there is little unique difficulty in explaining how we know or become aware of

¹ For another concise definition of realism making use of the notion of objectivity presented here, see Elizabeth Tropman, “Renewing Moral Intuitionism,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6 (2009): 442.

² J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 38.

moral facts vis-à-vis other types of facts. The moral perceptionists claims—and this is admittedly a highly contentious claim—that agents can know a theft is immoral, for instance, by seeing the moral fact of the matter. When stated broadly, MP thus centers on the claim that we can know putatively moral facts in much the same way that we seem to know non-moral or sensory ones: by perception. Advocates of MP describe perceptions as rich and contentful experiences in which perceivers encounter a variety of properties that go beyond simple sense properties. Just as we can perceive the complexity of a human face or a causal event, proponents of moral perception argue that we can perceive the injustice of a theft or the praiseworthiness of a woman telling the truth despite strong temptation to lie. If moral facts were directly perceivable in this way, then it would seem to go a long way to diffusing the worry that realists have no compelling account of moral knowledge.³

To illustrate some of the initial promise of moral perception and its key features, consider a thought experiment that has become common coin in descriptions of the view. Originally advanced by Gilbert Harman as a way to explore the relationship between observation and moral judgment, this scenario (hereafter CAT) has since been co-opted by supporters of MP as a paradigm case of a moral perception. In Harman's example, "Jim rounds a corner and sees a group of young hoodlums pouring gasoline on a cat and ignite it. Jim makes the spontaneous judgment 'What the children are doing is wrong'."⁴ As moral perceptionists have understood this case, Jim's determination that the children have acted immorally is not a considered judgment.⁵ Indeed, Jim does not seem to witness this grisly sight and then reason after the fact

³ To date, all defenses of moral perception have been explicitly an attempt to make moral realism more plausible. It is an open question whether something like moral perception could be developed within a different moral metaphysics. In this thesis, however, I consider perception epistemologies only as they feature within moral realism.

⁴ Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 8.

that what he has seen is morally wrong. He does not seem to be applying background moral beliefs or normative theories during the experience either. Moral perceptionists argue instead that Jim perceives the immorality before him in much the same way that he perceives the sensory facts of the crime. His belief that the children are acting immorally seems to be formed every bit as directly and immediately as his perception of any sensory facts that he may report such as that one of the hoodlums was wearing a red cap or that the hapless cat was a Tabby. Were Jim pressed to explain the source of his belief, he may even indicate that he could simply see that the act was immoral without appealing to any rational justification.

The recent explorations of moral perception suggest that there is more than a passing resemblance between perceptions of sensory facts and the formation of moral beliefs. Proponents of MP have offered arguments that attempt to leverage established descriptions of sensory perception into a perceptual theory that embraces even moral properties. The case of CAT offers one indication of how such arguments may run. When Jim rounds the corner to see the cat being set alight, his eyes may perceive a whole range of colors and shapes, he may smell the gasoline being used, and he may hear shrieks of the cat's pain or the jeering of the hoodlums. These forms of sensory perception are largely uncontroversial and are the stuff of daily experience and engagement with the external world. Yet few people would defend the claim that Jim's perceptions of this event are confined to patches of color in his visual field or to isolated auditory impressions. Supporters of MP point to a range of complex properties that seem to be perceived alongside the simple sense data of sights, smells, and sounds. We may imagine that Jim perceives the faces of the hoodlums or that he can identify the creature being tortured as a

⁵ For CAT in MP literature, see Sarah McGrath, "Moral Knowledge by Perception," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 210; Andrew Cullison, "Moral Perception," *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2009): 160.

cat. Though each of these complex properties is distinct from the raw sense data which constitute it, it would seem implausible to deny that each is a genuine feature of perception.

In light of this apparent ability to perceive a range of complex properties such as the pattern of the human face, advocates of MP suggest that it should not be unreasonable to think that Jim's moral evaluation that "what the hoodlums are doing is wrong" might also be a product of perception. Central to the defense of MP is the claim that moral properties are quite similar to the kinds of complex properties routinely permitted in accounts of non-moral perception. Just as we speak of perceiving another's emotion from behavioral cues, MP proponents think that moral evaluations such as morally right or morally wrong are simply complex properties that are nonetheless open to perception. When Jim rounds the corner, he seems to be presented with all the evidence he needs in order to determine that the burning of the cat is morally wrong. If MP is correct, then Jim's moral determination is as immediate and direct as his visual perception of the flames. Current defenses of MP are often more suggestive than precise, but their central claim that moral agents can literally perceive moral properties in this way already distinguishes the view from all rival moral epistemologies.

The literature on moral perception is still in its infancy, but its supporters have already begun to assess the promise of the view and to hypothesize on what its impact might be. Some scholars have touted MP as a substantial departure from other more established moral epistemologies. Justin McBrayer and Andrew Cullison, for example, have suggested that MP is unique in offering a broadly empirical account of moral beliefs. Cullison in fact identifies the perceptual view with the claim that "some moral knowledge is basic empirical knowledge."⁶ McBrayer adds that this empirical view that moral properties can be perceived much like sensory properties is quite distinct from established explanations of moral belief. He notes that most

⁶ Cullison, 159.

other moral epistemologies are decidedly “rationalistic” in the sense moral belief is attained by some kind of cognitive reflection.⁷ Rather than imagining moral facts as features of a hidden or mysterious realm of mind-independent properties, proponents of MP argue that moral facts are part of the natural or empirical world.⁸ It seems that for at least some of its proponents, the promise of MP is that it seems to abolish any sharp distinction between how we may know moral facts and non-moral ones. If this claim could be vindicated, supporters of moral perception suggest that it would help to provide a firm epistemological foundation for moral realism and restore credibility to the view in the face of skeptics.

This thesis takes up and examines the literature on moral perception and offers a provisional argument that perception epistemologies do not really represent a distinct or novel explanation of moral belief. In fact, MP may be best articulated and defended as a version of moral intuitionism. In Chapter 1, I look chiefly to define MP more precisely and to examine in some of its theoretical underpinnings. In order to get clear on the features of the view, I cull recent descriptions of MP and distill what I think is a reasonably common understanding of the position. As readers will learn, there is no one feature that neatly defines MP, and my own attempt at defining “moral perception” is admittedly *an* interpretation of the literature. As I understand it, MP relies on several constituent claims: moral properties can be *represented* in

⁷ Justin McBrayer, “A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,” *Philosophical Studies* 149, no. 3 (2010): 306.

⁸ I point in several places below to this “naturalizing” aspiration of the moral perception literature. I describe MP as a tending toward a naturalized moral epistemology in the sense that its proponents often describe moral properties as “natural” or “empirical” properties. To say that a target property is natural in the sense intended is to claim that it can be studied profitably by the methods of the empirical or physical sciences. For the ethical naturalist, moral theorizing may involve the kind of sensory observation and analysis that one might use to study properties outside the moral domain. The motivation for this comparison between moral inquiry and scientific inquiry is evidently to reduce the charge that moral knowledge is mysterious in ways that scientific knowledge is not. For one notable example of this naturalist strand in metaethics, see any recent work in “Cornell” realism e.g. David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

perception, moral properties have unique *phenomenological* features, and moral beliefs are formed *non-inferentially*. The sections of Chapter 1 explore each of these claims in turn.

In Chapter 2, I make the argument that, far from representing a new or distinct moral epistemology, MP may in fact be a form of intuitionism in slightly different garb. I develop this argument by analogizing in several discrete stages moral perceptions with a particular class of intuitions known as appearances. This analogy serves to highlight the fact that moral intuitionism and MP have close functional similarities. Both perceptions and appearances are putatively non-inferential in the sense that neither is grounded upon a chain of reasoning or requires justification in order to be formed. Perceptions and appearances also have similar experiential characteristics in that each is an unobtrusive mental state that seems to put agents into direct contact with properties or features of the external world. I develop sympathetically these and further points of analogy in the sub-sections of Chapter 2. By chapter's end, I maintain that in view of the strong functional similarities between perceptions and appearance intuitions, there is little barrier to articulating MP as a form of intuitionism. I conclude by offering some indication of what this overlap with intuitionism may mean for the future of MP. On the one hand, exposing the intuitionist features of MP likely threatens the aspirations of some perceptionists who see their view as an independent and distinct response to skepticism against moral realism. Despite this loss of uniqueness, I suggest that MP also stands to gain by any association with intuitionism and its accounts of the justification of moral beliefs.

COMING TO TERMS WITH MORAL PERCEPTION

1.1 Toward a Definition of Moral Perception

The central claim of MP that some moral knowledge is the result of perception is simply stated, but the task remains to bring some precision to this view and to clarify as much as possible its principal features. In what follows, I look to develop something of a composite sketch of MP as it has been articulated in recent articles and monographs and to do so largely in the terms set out by its advocates. My principal aim is to expose a core of working assumptions that might command wide assent among those interested in defending a version of MP as a plausible moral epistemology. By emphasizing what seems reasonably common to various statements of MP, I will of course obscure certain particularities and leave unstated some positions which individual authors might think important to the view. I acknowledge this tendency at the outset, but I suspect that it cannot be helped. To be sure, there is likely not a summary statement of MP to be found but rather many variations, and MP is not a monolithic position but perhaps a family of related views.

Yet variations are inevitably variations on a common theme, and even family members can be identified by some shared resemblance. Rather than pursuing all of the intricacies of the positions offered by various proponents of MP such as Robert Audi, Andrew Cullison, or Justin McBrayer, for instance, I look instead to define what characteristics are necessary to identify *any* position with a claim to being under the umbrella of MP. As some of MP's critics have observed, few have attempted such a detailed or positive presentation of the position, preferring instead to deal with potential objections to the view or more limited discussions of supposed cases of moral

perception.⁹ The attempt at a more sustained and synoptic treatment of MP given here, then, seems justified, and it will be worth the effort to get a clearer presentation of what distinguishes MP from rival epistemologies. I will argue in subsequent chapters that MP does not succeed as a distinct moral epistemology and that it might be understood best as an elaboration of core features of intuitionism. I delay this criticism, however, in order to provide what I hope will be accepted as a charitable and much-needed statement of the view.

There have been a few notable attempts to date at providing a concise formulation of MP. Some of MP's proponents—most notably Sarah McGrath and Matthew Werner—as well as Pekka Väyrynen, an early critic of perception epistemologies, have advanced compact definitions of MP. While these definitions look to make more apparent the various commitments and distinctives of a moral epistemology based on perception, I suggest that they have been too sparing in important respects. Matthew Werner for instance defines MP narrowly as a claim about the contents of perception: “At least some moral properties can be part of the contents of perceptual experiences.”¹⁰ Pekka Väyrynen's definition emphasizes similarly that moral properties can be part of the contents of perception: “At least some moral properties can figure in the contents of (veridical) perceptual experience.”¹¹ These largely descriptive claims that perception may include experience of moral properties certainly lies at the heart of MP, but of itself, it gives little sense of how MP is supposed to offer an epistemic path to moral knowledge. To her credit, Sarah McGrath's definition makes some gesture toward this epistemological dimension. In McGrath's mature thinking, MP can be identified as the view that “We have some

⁹ For a representative criticism of the MP literature on this score, see Pekka Väyrynen, “Doubts About Moral Perception,” Unpublished Draft Document (April 2014): 9.

¹⁰ Matthew Werner, “Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience,” Unpublished Draft Document (April 2014): 3. This piece is forthcoming in the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*.

¹¹ Väyrynen, 3.

moral knowledge by perceiving moral facts, and this perceptual knowledge does not rest on non-moral evidence.”¹² While I will depart noticeably from McGrath’s characterizations of MP below, I follow her at least in thinking that any definition of the position ought to reveal the dual commitment of MP as both a claim about the contents of perception and a robust moral epistemology which purports to explain how perceptions translate into justified moral beliefs. My own definition seeks to establish this balance and emphasis and to do so in terms both more positive and explicit than the existing MP literature.

As I shall understand it, MP can be identified broadly as the following claim:

(MP): At least some credible moral beliefs proceed non-inferentially from perceptual experiences whose contents include moral properties.

This provisional definition will provide a useful orientation to some of the principal issues and debates that have propelled recent treatments of MP. While I dilate considerably on this definition in the ensuing pages, I argue most significantly that it might be further parsed to expose the theoretical commitments necessary to uphold the position. These theoretical underpinnings animate defenses of the various versions of MP. For MP to become established as a respectable view, I believe its proponents must defend, at minimum, the idea that the “contents” of perception may in principle include moral properties, that these properties may contribute to something like a “perceptual experience,” and finally that such experiences contributes “non-inferentially” to “credible” moral beliefs. By “credible” beliefs, I intend moral beliefs that have some positive epistemic status and are more likely than not to be justified or initially plausible. I maintain that the definition of MP can be further elucidated by three corresponding claims:

A. **Representational Claim (RC):** Moral properties are the sort of properties that *can* in principle be represented directly in some cases of perception.

¹² Sarah McGrath, “Moral Knowledge by Perception,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 223.

- B. **Phenomenological Claim (PC):** There are compelling experiential reasons to think that moral properties *are* in fact represented directly in some perceptual experiences.
- C. **Epistemological Claim (EC):** Both the initial perception of moral properties and the fuller moral judgments or appraisals that may result from these perceptions are non-inferential and do not depend upon an agent's taking non-moral facts as premises.

Each of these claims emerges naturally from the existing accounts of MP, and each can be seen in various degrees of maturity in the works of authors who have expressed sympathy for a perception epistemology. It is certainly possible that non-perceptual accounts of moral knowledge may endorse one or more of these claims. Taken collectively, however, MP advocates appear keen to vindicate all three, and when evaluating MP below, I do so with reference to these claims. If a moral perceptionist were able to defend each of these claims cogently, then there would seem to be good reasons to suppose that some credible moral beliefs could be the result of a perceptual process. While RC, PC, or EC alone may prove insufficient to vindicate MP, when considered collectively they do offer reasons to think that moral beliefs such as the one in CAT could be products of something like perception.

In the remainder of this chapter, I treat each of these three claims in turn with an eye toward how they have been developed and defended in the literature. It should quickly become evident that distilling the general definition of MP into these three overlapping claims neatly exposes the series of argumentative moves that have been made in defense of the view. The Representational Claim (RC), for instance, has played the role of a preparatory move. In order to establish some initial plausibility for the idea that agents can perceive moral facts or properties in some robust or meaningful way, proponents of MP have first looked to articulate a theory of perception that can accommodate such properties into the company of less controversial sensory

properties widely acknowledged as open to perception. In their defenses of RC, moral perceptionists have made some notable attempts to argue that moral properties could be situated within a representational theory of perception. For its part, the Phenomenological Claim (PC) is likely the most developed facet of existing accounts of MP. As both critics and supporters have made clear, one of the chief ways to motivate a perceptual model is by appeal to what seem to be experiential encounters with moral values or properties.¹³ Indeed the central feature of PC is not simply that moral properties *may* feature in the contents of perception but that they regularly do so in ways that are tightly integrated with other contents of perception. Were one to witness a lie voiced in open court, for example, there may be telltale signs that one also perceives a moral property. One might experience some emotional aversion, or there may be a kind of primitive apprehension that the pattern of facts being witnessed is unjust or even more generally immoral. Several authors have looked to defend MP by appeal to these kinds of phenomenological experiences or responses. Their work seems to suggest that moral properties too feature prominently in perception and produce clear experiential signs. Finally, what I have called the Epistemological Claim (EC) seeks to give at least a provisional account of *how* it is that we become aware of moral properties in experience and *how* such properties may relate to moral beliefs or appraisals. As we shall see, MP proponents have typically described both processes as apparently non-inferential and unmediated.

I argue that were moral perceptionists able to secure each of these three claims, their efforts would lend themselves to a moral epistemology at least comparable to the formulation of MP given above. If successful, RC would secure the perception of distinctly moral properties as

¹³ For the importance of broadly “phenomenological” argument in defenses of MP, see Värynen, 2; Andrew Cullison has examined contrasting cases in which certain situations with clear moral dimensions apparently fail to produce fitting experiential responses. See Cullison, 160-163. My discussion of Matthew Werner’s “Contrast Arguments” in Section 1.3.2 also relies crucially on PC as it is articulated above.

a live theoretical possibility, PC would provide compelling evidence of real experiential encounters with such properties, and EC would provide some detail about how perceptions of moral properties emerge and what role they might play in moral evaluations or judgments. Any target moral belief satisfying these claims seems likely to be credible. If, for example, Jim's belief in CAT that the hoodlums have acted immorally could be demonstrated to be the result of a perceptual experience involving a represented moral property, experiential evidence that this property has actually been encountered by an agent, and some plausible account of how the agent becomes directly aware of the property, his belief surely must have at least a provisional justification or warrant. The discussions of moral perception on offer in the recent literature have often run discussions of these various claims together and provided little sense of how they relate or build upon one another. By examining each successively, I make plain the hurdles that MP would have to overcome to emerge as a respectable account of moral beliefs. Developing the argument for MP in stages will further allow readers to precisely identify those aspects of the view that have drawn criticism. The argumentative survey provided below, then, is much needed and I hope will be accepted as no small act of service to an inchoate literature.

1.2 Representationalism and the Case for Moral Properties

One obvious and significant challenge facing proponents of MP has been to articulate a general account of perception that is capable of making sense of even such surprising and potentially problematic properties as moral ones. There is little controversy in speaking of perception when it comes to sensory qualities such as size, shape, or color, but is it possible to perceive something like justice or immorality? By defending something like the Representational Claim (RC), moral perceptionists look to overcome this initial skepticism. RC functions as a kind of threshold claim which states simply "moral properties are the sort of

properties that *can* in principle be represented directly in some cases of perception.” The stakes of this claim to a direct perception of a moral property are obviously high for any defense of MP. Stripped of its provocative stance that agents can truly perceive moral properties in some interesting sense, MP would not offer a novel or distinct moral epistemology. Sarah McGrath, for example, seems at pains to distinguish MP as a claim about genuine perception of moral properties from any more attenuated or figurative sense of perception. McGrath resists in particular the idea that we loosely perceive moral facts by intellectually judging that some event has a certain moral character.¹⁴ The problem with the view that moral qualities might be perceived through rational examination, McGrath explains, is not that it is false but that it is trivially true and it fails to delimit MP from rival epistemologies or even judgments in normative ethics.¹⁵ By advancing RC, however, MP advocates have made the much stronger claim that moral properties are part of the contents of perception alongside say the colors of a sunset or the sounds of children playing in the schoolyard. It is to this controversial claim that I now turn.

As its name implies, RC relies thoroughly on a representational theory of perception. Such a representational view holds that our perceptions are not unmediated encounters between the human sensorium and the external world but rather mental states that represent the world and its many properties. These intervening mental states allows representational theories to draw a distinction between the mere sensory perceiving of some object X and the richer representation of X as some instance of a property or quality P. While much of the MP literature does not

¹⁴ See McGrath, 221-222; McGrath’s principal target here is the earlier claim of Watkins and Jolley that moral perception can be likened to an “intellectualized perceptual ability.” See Michael Watkins and Kelly Dean Jolley, “Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 1 (2002): 77.

¹⁵ This is not to suggest, however, that rational insight *per se* is incompatible with moral perception. Some advocates of MP—most notably McBrayer and Chappell—describe the perceptual work of MP as chiefly a kind of rational intuition or recognitional ability that allows one to see when moral properties are instantiated among empirical properties. What distinguishes this view from the kind of rationalization critiqued above is apparently its non-inferentiality and immediacy.

engage philosophical work on perception to significant depth, it draws obvious inspiration from some established descriptions and motifs of representational theories. McBrayer, for example, enlists Dretske's distinction between "seeing" and "seeing *as*" and Grice's contrast between mere "seeing" and "observing" to make clear the idea that perception seems to include mental states which represent more than mere sensations.¹⁶ We may imagine, for example, that Jane goes for a walk on a clear, hot day. She likely feels a sensation of warmth, sees the shape of a body in the sky, and can perceive its tremendous brightness. Such are the literal contents of her perception, yet few would maintain that her perception is confined to these discrete sensations. We say, seemingly without controversy, that Jane not only experiences brightness, warmth, and the visual impression of a star but also perceives these sensory qualities *as* the sun. Defenses of MP often begin with the presumption that while we may not see moral qualities in the exactly way we see shapes or colors, we may see particular events or circumstances *as* having a particular moral salience or quality annexed to them. Though a property such as injustice is likely unperceivable by any obvious visual, tactile, or other sensory qualities, RC suggests it might nonetheless be represented in the contents of a perceptual mental state.¹⁷

¹⁶ See McBrayer, 306-307; Fred Dretske, *Seeing and Knowing* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), 9. It should be noted that Dretske's own interaction with the "seeing" vs. "seeing *as*" distinction is both more selective and complex than McBrayer indicates. Dretske's use of the distinction comes not as a general statement about representations but a commentary on what beliefs one may form based upon representations; for Grice's distinction, see H.P. Grice, "The Causal Theory of Perception," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 35 (1961): 121-152.

¹⁷ In fact, the language of perceiving a moral property directly may be a bit misleading. What MP authors likely intend is that moral agents can perceive tokens or instantiations of moral qualities as they appear in the context of concrete situations and events. In other words, the representational claim should not lead one to the conclusion that MP amounts to literally perceiving something like the timeless or immaterial quality of injustice. Moral "types" of this sort may remain intangible and immaterial, but they may be tokened or made perceivable in specific situations. It is this fact that also helps make sense of the "seeing" vs. "seeing *as*" distinction as it applies to moral perception. If the moral agent cannot literally see a moral type or independent property like "fairness," the perceptionist claims, it certainly *is* possible to perceive a particular event *as* an instance, case, or token of fairness. To see *as*, in other words does, not mean to see a moral property *simpliciter* but rather to see that a given pattern of facts or events may be fittingly described by a particular moral descriptor. Seeing *as*, however, must be distinguished just as carefully from judgment. Seeing *as* may involve a particular appearance or a seeming state in which some event appears to have a certain moral character. This seeming or appearance may or may not be

Among the many representational theories of perception on offer, Susanna Siegel’s “content view” has attracted the most sustained interest in the MP literature. Siegel’s view of perception has also done much to set the terms and general shape of the argumentation that has been put forth to vindicate RC.¹⁸ In Siegel’s understanding, perceptions—especially the paradigmatic case of visual perception—are phenomenal experiences in which certain contents are represented to perceivers.¹⁹ Siegel notes that many of the contents of visual perception include such widely acknowledged qualities as “spatial properties, color, shape, motion, and illumination.”²⁰ Of greater interest to MP advocates, however, is Siegel’s defense of what she terms the “rich content view.” She argues at considerable length that the contents of perception are often much more numerous and complex than comparatively low-level sensory properties. By “rich content,” Siegel intends higher-order properties such as conceptual recognition of objects, patterns of action, affective states and emotions, causal relationships, and much more.²¹ Were we to join Jane for her afternoon stroll, we might conclude along with Siegel that we could perceive a whole range of such higher-order or “rich” content. We might perceive, for instance, trees or songbirds, see the faces of others along our route, or sense the pain of a jogger struggling to maintain her pace. Under Siegel’s content view, these higher-order properties are not later judgments or beliefs formed on the basis of simpler perceptions. Siegel maintains that the

confirmed by later or more reflective judgment. A non-moral example may illustrate this distinction. When I view a stick partially submerged in water, for instance, it may appear or seem to me to be bent. In this case, I could be said to see the stick *as* bent. However, I may quickly entertain and accept the considered judgment that the stick is in fact straight given what I know about objects out of water or the effects of refraction in visual experience.

¹⁸ See Susanna Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ For all the gestures toward perception writ large, much of the discussion of perception found in the recent treatments of MP and allied discussions of perception among representational theorists inordinately favor visual perception.

²⁰ Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experiences*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Part II; Susanna Siegel, “Which Properties are Represented in Perception,” in Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne, eds. *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 483.

jogger's pain and the green of summer foliage are both equally and immediately part of the phenomenal contents of perception itself. The idea that such rich content may feature in perception has served as springboard for those eager to place moral properties in perception.

Against the backdrop of Siegel's rich content view, it becomes possible to discern more clearly the nature of the claim made in RC. Several authors deploy RC to argue that moral properties are simply another species of rich or higher-order properties that should be acknowledged among the contents of perception. This belief that a representational theory of perception may be leveraged to support genuine perception of moral properties has been a persistent feature of the fledgling scholarship on MP. McGrath, one of the earliest proponents of a version of MP, explains that the fact that we can evidently perceive other rich content makes the perception of moral properties at least initially respectable:

Many people think that on the face of it, this view is not at all plausible. They think that it is implausible that we can *perceive* that, for example, torturing a cat is wrong. But [MP] does not say that there is some dedicated organ of moral perception, or that moral perception is just like perceiving colors and shapes, or that the blind can't perceive moral facts, or that we can perceive moral facts without a lot of conceptual sophistication. We can perceive that other people are in pain, that it's time to water the plants, or that Fred told a joke. The proponent of [MP] can say that moral perception is like that.²²

Subsequent defenders of MP have largely followed suit. Andrew Cullison reasons similarly that in view of the whole range of apparently rich or complex properties open to perception it should be admitted that moral properties might also be perceivable. He explains that one way of motivating MP is to highlight the fact that "moral properties are relevantly similar to other complex non-moral properties that we clearly do have perceptual knowledge of."²³ Chappell, too, shares this presumption that perception exposes an entire range of complex properties into which it seems quite possible to situate moral ones. He notes that such simple acts of perception such as perceiving a human face or a chair involve recognizing complex "patterns" of sensations

²² McGrath, 220-221.

²³ Cullison, 160.

perceived as instantiations of certain concepts. Moral properties, too, might plausibly be seen as “just what many other properties are: patterns in reality.”²⁴ By highlighting what I have termed RC, then, I call attention to an argumentative strategy that runs through recent presentations of MP. McGrath and successor perceptionists attempt to wield a respectable—if still divisive—view in the philosophy of perception by suggesting that moral properties are simply the next logical candidates for higher order properties to be recognized in perception.

If the central motivation of RC is thus to apply a representational account of perception in a novel way to moral qualities, the reasons MP advocates find to support this application are initially less clear. In some instances, MP supporters offer little more than a suggestion that such a move *should* be possible without substantive argument to bolster this presumption. Andrew Cullison’s handling of what I have termed RC, for instance, demonstrates this suggestive rather than argumentative approach. As we have seen, Cullison, makes common cause with McGrath in contending that moral properties ought to be considered relevant high-order properties, but his reason for thinking that moral properties can be represented in ways similar to other properties are not forthcoming. After adducing several examples to demonstrate how we seem to have perceptual abilities that allow us to discern any number of higher order properties such as the distinctions between various kinds of “dry red wine,” his case for a comparable representation of moral properties is scant. He notes simply “there is little reason not to extend this to moral properties.”²⁵ In the full context of Cullison’s article, it is clear that he thinks he has vindicated the claim that moral properties can be perceived in something akin to the perception of non-moral properties, but this defense gets fleshed out in ways that depart in important respects from

²⁴ Timothy Chappell, “Moral Perception,” *Philosophy* 83, no. 4 (2008): 430.

²⁵ Cullison, 160.

the language of representation.²⁶ Skeptics and would-be-supporters of MP alike may hope that defenders of MP could produce some more trenchant argument that moral properties can be reconciled to a representational theory of perception. Perhaps owing to the novelty of the MP thesis and the still-developing state of the literature, such arguments may be somewhat underdeveloped in favor of thought experiments such as CAT.

Proponents of MP, however, have sounded a few argumentative notes to urge readers in support of something like RC. Sarah McGrath develops a short argument from skepticism that may reveal one path for including moral properties as rich or higher order content in perception. McGrath explains that the question of whether moral properties can be represented in perception may be considered by analogy to Hume's well-known problem of induction and the question of whether or not we can perceive the causal connection between any cause and its effect.²⁷ Led by a mitigated skepticism, Hume had of course denied that such a perception of this causal power or force was possible. When a billiard ball strikes another, I do not perceive any causation which may link the two, merely the succession of one ball moving and then another. Just as Hume had denied direct perception of causation, McGrath explains, some skeptics have looked to undercut the core idea of MP that we can perceive moral properties or qualities. One might suggest, for example, that Jim's experience in CAT need not involve a representation of a moral property. The skeptic may charge that when Jim rounds the corner he sees "gasoline," a "cat," and the act of some group of children "pouring gasoline on the cat." We needn't think, however, that our

²⁶ Cullison's preferred account of how moral properties can be recognized in perceptual experience in fact rests on a very short, and I argue underdeveloped notion of "causal contact." Evidently Cullison believes that moral properties are causally efficacious in the sense that they can affect us in ways that are identified with other modes of perception.

²⁷ For the most lucid presentation of Hume's denial of causation, see Tom Beauchamp, ed., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), § 4.

perception includes “some additional fact—that what the kids are doing is wrong.”²⁸ The implications of this potential skeptical response to MP are clear. If it is possible to imagine that Jim’s experience in CAT involves perceptions whose content include no indication of a moral property, then there is no compelling reason to think that all cases of moral judgment might not also be explained away without appeal to representations of moral properties.

McGrath, however, intimates that such a Humean skepticism applied to higher-order moral properties may have unintended and undesirable consequences. She invokes the earlier work of Elizabeth Anscombe who had pressed Hume’s skepticism on causation to what she saw as its logical consequences. Anscombe had argued that Hume’s understanding that we experience no direct perception of causal relationships but only the constant conjunction of cause and effect might quite easily be extended to the claim that we do not perceive even something as commonplace as a billiard ball but only impressions of a “round white patch in our visual fields.”²⁹ Anscombe’s point is evidently that Hume’s skepticism assumes from the outset that nothing like causation can be found in experience or perception but lacks the resources to explain why such disbelief should not prevent other comparable properties from being ruled out. While McGrath leaves the final reasons for this allusion to Anscombe’s critique of Hume unstated, a sympathetic reader might easily judge the relevance of the example. The conclusion that McGrath implicitly draws here is that a skeptic who denies that we can have representations of rich moral content or higher-order moral properties has apparently no principled reason to permit other forms of higher order content. It seems strange, for example, that Jim’s mental states in CAT might include representations of higher order properties such as the faces of the children or

²⁸ McGrath, 221.

²⁹ Elizabeth Anscombe, “Causality and Determination,” in Laura Ekstrom, ed. *Agency and Responsibility: Essays on the Metaphysics of Freedom* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 61.

the representation of the animal being burned as a cat but not include the moral property of wrongness. One might plausibly question whether either the skeptic or McGrath has really done enough work to compare moral properties to non-moral higher order properties or to sift out the various ways in which they might be seen as comparable or distinct. However, McGrath thinks that at a minimum, skepticism directed at the idea that moral properties might be represented in experience (RC), lacks a principled foundation. McGrath may be correct that her reply at least raises problems for those eager to deny that some rich content may include moral properties.

Justin McBrayer has arguably done the most concerted work to find a place for moral properties within a representational theory of perception. In a brief article responding to some potential objections to MP, McBrayer offers perhaps the most positive statement to date for why moral properties should be recognized as higher-order perceptual content. McBrayer's case for such higher-order representations unfolds as a response to a brace of arguments meant to undercut MP: the "No Higher Order Representation Argument" and the "Looks Objection."³⁰ The "No Higher Order Representation Argument" stakes out the more thoroughgoing claim that no higher order properties—moral or otherwise—can be represented. According to McBrayer, defenses of this position often presuppose a form of "content externalism" with respect to perception. Content externalists contend that the content of a mental state is "determined by the relation between the mental state and the external environment."³¹ Representations of simple sensory properties, according to this view, are typically easy to explain since they can be traced to features of the world with which they causally co-vary. Our perceptions of size and shape, for instance, seem to be straightforwardly products of our spatial relation to external objects and

³⁰ For the "No Higher Order Representation Argument," see McBrayer, "A Limited Defense of Moral Perception," § 4. For the "Looks Objection," see § 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 311.

vary with factors such as distance and perspective. Content externalists, however, find that this direction of fit between the world and representations is absent in the case of higher-order properties such as moral qualities.³² It is admittedly more difficult to imagine how a mental representation of say moral wrongness could be traced to some causal source in the external world. If something akin to causal co-variation with external content were a precondition for mental representations, it is easy to see how MP may face serious and abiding difficulties.

By contrast, the “Looks Objection” does not target the possibility of any and all representations of higher order content but suggests simply that moral properties are uniquely problematic as candidate representations. Motivating this objection is the idea that our representations of most even higher-order properties are comprised of—or at the very least informed by—distinct visual sensations or other sensory properties. Even our mental representations of such complex properties as facial identity are inextricably connected to a certain sensory look or feel. According to the Looks Objection, representations of moral properties—if such representations were possible—would be entirely *sui generis* in this regard since they rely on no obvious sensory properties. Michael Huemer neatly states the same worry: “moral properties are entirely unobservable. Moral value does not look like anything, sound like anything, feel (to the touch) like anything, smell like anything, or taste like anything.”³³ The Looks Objection offers an intuitive—and I think quite formidable—challenge to MP, for it raises the obvious concern of how relevant or fitting the language of perception may be in the case of properties that are inaccessible to sensation. The fact that moral perceptionists may fail to describe moral properties through any sensory modality but nonetheless insist on defending the

³² For a representative externalists critique of higher order properties, see Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 141.

³³ Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85.

capacity to perceive such properties calls for explanation. For the moral perceptionist, failing to adequately rebut the Looks Objection may amount to conceding that MP does not involve perception in any common, obvious, or meaningful sense.

McBrayer's responses to these two objections are technical and layered, but even in their broad outline they do help clarify how representational mental states may underwrite perception of moral properties. He pushes back against the "No Higher Order Representations Argument" on several fronts. One first and expedient strategy that might shield MP from this critique is simply to reject the content externalism—with its requirement of causal co-variation with the sources of percepts in the external world—from which the objection gains its force.³⁴ In my judgment, however, McBrayer's more persuasive response to this general skepticism against higher order properties in perception is that it seems to conflict with our intuitive sense that perceptions are routinely populated by rich or higher-order content. He develops this sense of conflict by pointing to what he argues is Michael Tye's somewhat awkward account of what our perception of a tiger must involve. Tye had argued that when we see a tiger, there is no reason to suppose that we truly perceive the property of being a tiger or the identity of the tiger as a token of the general type "tiger." Tye notes "our sensory states do not track *this* feature."³⁵

For a content externalist such as Tye, the rationale for denying that we perceive the quality of being a tiger or tigerness is evidently that such a property does not co-vary in obvious ways with

³⁴ It should be noted that McBrayer also envisions two other responses that both accept content externalism but look to salvage MP on other grounds. First, the moral perceptionist could accept externalism but argue that this does not in principle preclude the representation of higher order properties without further argument or demonstration (p. 312). Alternatively, the moral perceptionist could accept content externalism and concede that it would make the representation of moral properties impossible but argue that something like moral perception may still be possible even without such representation. McBrayer owns that this strategy "denies an essential link between perceptual representation and perceptual knowledge by claiming that it is not necessary for an experience to represent *P* in order for that experience to provide a subject with perceptual knowledge that *P*" (p. 313). I argue that this response which does not make a claim to the representation of moral properties may offer one way to defend a perception epistemology but that this position would not be recognizable as MP as I have articulated it above and it would bear little resemblance to other versions of MP that have gained some traction among other authors.

³⁵ Tye, 141.

sense data. According to McBrayer, however, “intuitively, this seems wrong” and Tye’s skepticism asks us to suspend our pre-theoretical sense that when we see a tiger, we perceive the creature *as* a tiger. A more sensible account, McBrayer, argues is to think “having a tiger-like phenomenal experience is a pretty good indicator of the presence of a tiger.”³⁶ Absent a compelling reason to find otherwise, it seems more plausible under this view to suppose that an encounter with a live tiger could produce higher-order representations as of a tiger or tigerness. If the representation of a low level property is enough to signal the presence of a real low-level property that is being perceived, McBrayer seems wont to argue, then there is no reason to presume that the representations or phenomenal experiences of higher-order moral properties are not similarly grounded in genuine, causal encounters with such properties.

McBrayer’s handling of the “Looks Objection” goes still further in bolstering RC. At one level, McBrayer’s chief response to this objection is simply that it presumes at the outset a stable definition of what is entailed by phenomenological “looks” that cannot withstand closer inspection. He explains that it is not at once clear how there is a view of looks or sense experience which is uniform with respect to other higher order properties but which is somehow problematic when applied to moral properties. McBrayer examines several views of phenomenological looks that might clarify the objection, but finds each wanting. He treats, for example, the view that looks amounts to an “experiential-doxastic” claim that when we see or experience a certain property it incites us to a belief state. He argues quite plausibly that moral properties can clearly phenomenally look in ways that dispose one to moral beliefs. Harman’s CAT is a case in point since it suggests that any perception of a moral property such as “wrongness” often contributes to the judgment that what is being perceived really *is* wrong.³⁷

³⁶ McBrayer, 312.

In this section, I have examined what has emerged as a popular preparatory argument in some of the recent defenses of moral perception. Among moral perceptionists, something comparable to what I have been calling the Representational Claim (RC) has served to ground the central notion of MP that we can perceive moral properties in some plausible philosophy of perception. The notion that we can perceive a property as conceptual and non-sensory as injustice is likely to face considerable skepticism, and by advancing something like RC, moral perceptionists have sought to motivate at the outset a particular understanding of perception favorable to MP. By invoking the language and concept of representations, RC skirts the claim we perceive moral properties crudely or directly with the human sensorium. RC suggests instead that our perceptions are more than mere collections of sense data but rather complex mental states which mediate between objects or events in themselves and our lived experience or awareness of them. It is in the contents of these representational states, RC suggests, that we perceive moral properties. As we have seen, this claim has been developed—with some divergence and particularity—by Sarah McGrath, Andrew Cullison, Timothy Chappell, and Justin McBrayer. I have avoided critical assessment of RC above since the claim relies on wider disputes in the philosophy of perception that are themselves unsettled. How compelling readers find RC is likely to be determined by their disposition to recognize the possibility of any higher order representations at all. I think it fair to say, however, that RC is at least plausible as an argumentative strategy for MP. In view of the welter of other higher order properties from personal identity to causation that we appear to perceive in some robust way, the notion that moral properties may be similarly perceived is not outlandish.

1.3 Moral Perception and the Phenomenology of Moral Experience

³⁷ Ibid.

The discussion and argumentation put forth to secure RC is perhaps a useful preparatory move to ensure that MP gains at least some initial plausibility as a somewhat unorthodox view of perception. Yet most of the chief motivations and concerns of the MP program are tied to how the view purports to explain the lived experience of moral evaluation or belief. Indeed, Pekka Värynen—a critic of moral perception epistemologies—observes that one of the principal ways one might motivate the view is to observe its promise as a way of accounting for the phenomenology of experiences involving a moral quality or dimension. While Värynen ultimately finds fault with the position, he notes “it might be thought that certain moral experiences are best explained as perceptions of moral qualities.”³⁸ This is the major impetus behind what I have offered above as the Phenomenological Claim (PC) central to MP. As I shall understand it, PC should be viewed as the claim that “there are compelling experiential reasons to think that moral properties *are* in fact represented directly in some perceptual experiences.” By casting this experiential claim as a kind of phenomenological position, I do not intend to describe moral experience in the terms of horizons, intentionality, or any other of the themes of analysis employed by the continental tradition of Phenomenology. Rather, I intend the “phenomenology” of moral experience—in that loose sense employed by Thomas Nagel—to be the distinctive “what it’s like” for subjects to undergo such experiences.³⁹ As we shall see, advocates of MP maintain that the experience of moral perception suggests in telltale ways that we directly encounter moral qualities of events. If this claim that the lived experience of moral evaluation is best explained as a kind of direct or immediate perception of some sort or other, then there may be compelling reasons to accept MP.

³⁸ Pekka Värynen, “Doubts About Moral Perception,” (Unpublished Draft Manuscript, April 2014), 2.

³⁹ For this broader and more minimal understanding of phenomenology, see Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to be a Bat?” *Philosophical Perspectives* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435-450.

While it may be possible to identify a welter of different accounts of the phenomenology of moral experience, it will be useful to identify at the outset two popular orientations which emerge in the MP literature. At its heart, PC turns on the claim that there are “experiential reasons” to believe that one is in the right sort of contact—viz. a perceptual encounter—with a moral property. I maintain that these experiential reasons can be sifted into two primary characterizations. On the one hand, authors such as Justin McBrayer, Timothy Chappell, and Michael Watkins and Kelley Jolley emphasize that the experiential evidence of perceiving a moral property is broadly intellectual or cognitive in nature. For these authors, subjects’ experience of recognizing the moral qualities of an action or event often turns on a kind of rational insight or apprehension. We may say “what it’s like to perceive” a moral property in this sense is to recognize via the understanding that it is present or instantiated in a given case. By contrast, Matthew Werner and even more so Robert Audi—author of the only dedicated monograph on moral perception to date—has examined the role of affect, sensibility and emotion in MP.⁴⁰ To his credit, Audi recognizes that rational insight or intuition may signal that a moral property is being perceived, but he also examines at length the “evidential value emotions may have in ethical matters” and in moral perceptions.⁴¹ Over the course of two chapters, Audi examines the role of affective responses and emotions as both a sign and a consequence that one is in contact with a moral property. Our feelings of hesitancy, revulsion, or approval, for example, may result from observing a particular interaction or event. In such cases, Audi takes the experience of this emotion to be a signal that may predispose to believe or judge that we have perceived a moral property capable of inciting this kind of emotion. In what follows, I look to

⁴⁰ See Robert Audi, *Moral Perception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); many of Audi’s central insights in this monograph are developed in more modest form in “Moral Perception and Moral Knowledge,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 84 (2010): 79-97.

⁴¹ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 121.

flesh out the phenomenological features of these two broad approaches to moral experience and to consider how they help to secure PC and by extension the idea of moral perception itself.

1.3.1 Intellectualized Moral Experience

While it departs in key ways from some of the directions and emphases which the MP literature has taken, Watkins and Jolley's early writing on the nature of moral perception does reveal one orientation to the phenomenology of moral experience which has gained traction. As I have intimated above, this brace of authors views moral perception primarily as an "intellectualized perceptual ability."⁴² What these authors apparently have in mind is a view of perception as a kind of acquired ability to discriminate or discern rapidly that the contents of perception contain or evince certain concepts. They employ the example of a trained vintner, who by long and diligent practice has learned to identify wines with a single taste. In these cases, Watkins and Jolley want to say that the recognitional ability is a kind of true perception. It is not, as some may argue, a tasting followed by a subsequent judgment. Rather, when the vintner tastes the wine with his training in hand, the perception becomes enriched by this new conceptual sophistication. Cases of moral perception follow this pattern. Given a background exposure to moral concepts, one's ability to perceive moral properties represented in experience becomes more reliable and sharper. For Watkins and Jolley, then, moral perceptions are not simply naturalized mental states but only become operational with certain conceptual maturity.⁴³

⁴² Watkins and Jolley, 75.

⁴³ I concede that any moral perception must involve at least this prior intellectual exposure to moral concepts or properties in the sense described by Watkins and Jolley. In the case of sensory qualities such as color, it may be relatively uncontroversial to think that one can perceive redness without any prior familiarity with the concept of redness. One may lack the relevant descriptive vocabulary, but an agent who sees red without labeling it as "red" has still seen the color. Moral properties, however, are not sensory and any claim to perceive a moral property must, it seem, involve some recognition of the meaning and appropriate applications of this property. Since moral perception requires at least this minimal conceptual sophistication or training, the analogy between moral perception and other forms of "expert" perception noted above seem well motivated. The trained vintner, the chicken sexer, etc. all perceive in virtue of their prior training. It may be plausible to think, then, that some aspects

For their part, Justin McBrayer and Timothy Chappell each uphold this basic observation moral perception must involve cognitive components. McBrayer has offered what is arguably the most strident defense of the intellectual structure of moral perceptions. While the bulk of McBrayer's writings on MP have been proleptic attempts to combat critiques of MP, he does offer some preparatory discussion of such perceptions as intellectual states. For McBrayer, the mental states that are truly instances of moral perception are to be distinguished from broader forms of moral "experience." McBrayer's target here is a subject's "emotional or affective reactions to something," and he looks to parse these kind of affective responses from the narrow range of mental states worthy of being called "perception."⁴⁴ In his view, true moral perception is a form of conceptual recognition. We have already seen that for McBrayer MP involves not simply seeing but seeing *as*, and there are good reasons to think this seeing *as* is primarily conceptual or cognitive in nature. Indeed, McBrayer owns that perceptual experience of the sort he associates with MP is a mental state that "represents things to be the case" and is therefore expressed in "propositions."⁴⁵ Timothy Chappell too describes instances of moral perception as cognitive rather than affective states. While Chappell would likely affirm much of McBrayer's account of perceptions as propositional states, his central focus is rather on perceptions as forms of pattern recognition. He draws an extended parallel between patterns of facts that may be perceived and properties which are putatively constituted by those facts. When we claim to see a chair for instance, what we actually see are evidently sense qualities arranged in the pattern of a chair. "To see something as a chair," Chappell writes "is to represent perceptually as a falling

of moral perception may be augmented by greater degrees of moral training or ethical theorizing which occur prior to the act of perception. In short, Watkins and Jolley raise the possibility of moral perception as a kind of acquired moral expertise or ability to discriminate non-inferentially in the given case when a situation has a given moral property. For additional examples of this kind of acquired perceptual ability in other contexts, see Cullison, 160.

⁴⁴ McBrayer, "A Limited Defense of Moral Perception," 308.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 310.

under a pattern.”⁴⁶ Recognition of all complex properties such as “chairness,” facial recognition, and by extension moral properties all conform to this form of pattern recognition. With its emphasis on patterns and concepts, Chappell’s account of perceptual states is also an overtly cognitive or intellectual one. To be in a position to recognize patterns, one must already be approaching particular patterns of facts with a good deal of conceptual sophistication.

Watkins and Jolley, McBrayer, and Chappell, then, roundly agree that the essential character of a moral perception is as a cognitive or recognitional state, but what are the distinctive experiential features of such intellectual states? Answers to this question are difficult to come by, but Timothy Chappell does provide some useful indications of what their phenomenology might be. In Chappell’s understanding, the distinguishing experiential feature of pattern recognition—moral or otherwise—is the recognition itself taken as a kind of second-order awareness. Chappell appears to support the idea that what is most distinctive in perceiving that a certain complex property, say moral goodness, is present, is our own reflective awareness that what is being perceived can be taken *as* an instance of that property. To illustrate this point, Chappell contrasts the immediate perception of such complex properties with other forms of recognition such as the gradual understanding that a property may be present due to inference or third-person explanation. Using the example of seeing the shape of a cross in matrix of dots, Chappell explains that our perceiving or discerning the shape among the dots represents a different kind of experience than inferring that such a shape or pattern may be possible. There is “clearly an important contrast” between these states Chappell argues since “there is more phenomenologically speaking to...perception than there is to the inference.” He clarifies that this phenomenological difference is primarily that inference involves no experiential feel. To work out by inference that a rectangular array of dots may contain the shape of a cross is “topic

⁴⁶ Chappell, 425.

neutral” while “seeing the cross in the matrix *does* have a particular experiential feel.”⁴⁷

Chappell intimates that the experience of perceiving the complex property of shape within the pattern of dots is characterized by the feeling of awareness involved in recognizing or apprehending the shape. Intellectual apprehension, it seems, represents its own experiential cues tied directly to the act of knowing or recognizing itself.

Chappell provides one final example that further suggests what the phenomenology of such intellectual awareness may be. To more clearly distinguish between the kind of intellectual awareness gathered by inference or third-person description from the distinctive feeling of recognizing a pattern experientially, Chappell resurrects a well-known example employed to various effect in the philosophy of mind and the literature on the philosophy of color perception—the case of Mary the color-blind scientist.⁴⁸ Mary is a highly trained scientist specializing in the neurophysiology of vision. However, her entire life has been spent examining the world from a black and white room with only a black and white television monitor as her sole window to the outside world. One day Mary leaves this colorless environment and goes outside where she encounters a whole world of vibrant colors. Mary can infer from examining the relevant wavelengths of light that the colors around her can be identified as “red” or “blue” for example, but she lacks any experiential history with these colors. Even when she knows that her eyes are picking up the blue sky or the red petals of a flower, she does not seem to have a direct, unmediated experience of these colors, and her knowledge of colors appears therefore impoverished.⁴⁹ Chappell leverages this example to illustrate that the kind of intellectual

⁴⁷ Ibid., 428.

⁴⁸ I am indebted here to Frank Jackson’s own descriptions of the Mary thought experiment. See Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 127 (1982): 127-136; Frank Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 5 (1986): 291-295.

apprehensions assumed by his version of MP must have a distinctive experiential quality. He argues that when we claim to “perceive” a property—including both color and moral properties—this claim implies that we “grasp instances of this motif, and grasp them *as* instances of the motif.” He observes further that this “grasping happens by way of direct apprehension.”⁵⁰ Chappell’s portrayal of apprehension thus likens recognition to a kind of reflective awareness that what one is experiencing is a token of some complex property.

This claim that moral properties, when represented and encountered in experience, have some distinctive experiential feeling or characteristics is roughly what I have identified above as the phenomenological claim (PC) that many have thought helps to bolster MP. Taken collectively Watkins and Jolley, McBrayer, and Chappell can be taken to argue that representations of moral properties in perception do have a distinctive experiential character. Perceptual states involving moral properties, in the terms set out by these authors, are recognitional, cognitive, or intellectual states typified by some direct form of apprehension or awareness that a moral property is among the contents of perception. While I do not deny that such pattern recognition is possible in the case of higher order properties, I think it remains an open question to what extent such cases can be captured with the term perception. The ability to recognize patterns may be thought to presuppose a degree of conceptual sophistication and prior familiarity with cognitive content that is absent in more common forms of sensory perception. If we must already have a contentful idea of say injustice in order to recognize when we are being

⁴⁹ In this usage, the case of Mary the color blind scientist intersects with McBrayer’s handling of the Looks Objection examined above. In Chappell’s understanding, the perception of a moral property does have a highly distinctive “look,” but this look is not cashed out in terms of sensory properties. When Mary fails to perceive red as red, it is not because of a deficit in the specific *qualia* associated with phenomenal red. Her perceptual failure is her inability to recognize these *qualia* as following under the experience of “red.”

⁵⁰ Chappell, 428.

presented with tokens of injustice in experience, then our “perceptions” of this injustice seem to be more a case of discrimination or veiled judgment than literal perception.

1.3.2 Affective Moral Experience

While a few authors have thus pursued descriptions of the phenomenology of moral perception as a largely cognitive process of apprehension or pattern recognition, a more detailed and rich set of accounts emphasizes the role of affect and an agent’s emotions. As I have intimated above, both Matthew Werner and Robert Audi dedicate significant space to examining the centrality of emotional responsiveness as an integral feature of moral perception. Both Werner and Audi argue quite plausibly that our experiences of witnessing morally salient events are often first and foremost marked by some felt experience of moral disgust, revulsion, confusion, etc. Rather than casting these emotions as a later response following a more considered moral judgment, Werner and Audi argue that the *de facto* mode of our moral experience begins rather in affective states. Just as among the intellectualists examined above, the emphasis on affect and emotion is meant to secure something like the claim advanced by PC. Werner and Audi contend that emotional reactions which accompany moral experiences provide good reason to think that moral properties are among the content of our perceptions.

Werner looks to secure the importance of affect as a sign of genuine moral perception by employing the kind of “contrast example” which has been used to isolate and motivate other phenomenological concepts. Contrast examples, as Werner explains, follow a common structure in which a close analysis reveals a contrast between two “experiential states” which can be explained by some relevant difference in their phenomenological features or content. Such test

cases or examples have become common coin in a variety of contexts, and Werner himself points to Siegel's earlier use of such a contrast example to help motivate the "Rich Content View."⁵¹ Werner constructs his own contrast example as a way of underscoring the signal role that affective, empathic, or broadly emotional responses may play as signs or accompaniments of moral perceptions. He returns to Harman's now familiar thought experiment CAT and invites readers to imagine two disparate experiences of observing the cat being tortured. When Norma—a person with normal affective responsiveness—rounds the corner she demonstrates a set of normal reactions including a natural startle response, increased heart rate and noticeable discomfort at the sight of the animal's pain evidenced by eye twitching and blinking. Werner contrasts this relatively predictable response to that of Pathos, an "emotionally empathic dysfunction individual" or EEDI.⁵² EEDIs are those who, while they have the ability to perceive others as minded or independent beings, apparently do not or cannot mirror the emotional dispositions of others or correctly exhibit appropriate emotional responses to given situations. Pathos may be largely unmoved by the sight of the hoodlums torturing the cat. She may lack to a significant degree any of the behavioral or physiological signs of discomfort or revulsion that Norma's response exhibited. When presented with the same grisly scene of Harman's example, then, we may easily imagine a contrast between two types of emotional responses. This contrast, Werner argues, calls for explanation and that explanation seems to bolster core claims of MP.

In Werner's understanding, this contrast example promises good reasons to think that normal emotional responses are closely tied to something like moral perception. Werner notes

⁵¹ See Werner, 2. For the place of Siegel's "Rich Content View" in MP, see §1.2 above; Werner also highlights the use of contrast examples in other contexts such as the Ishihara Test of Colorblindness in which subjects are asked to discriminate green shapes or numbers from a red background.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8-9; Werner identifies such individuals as having some psychopathic tendencies but otherwise does not provide additional details or take a stand about specific clinical diagnoses which might be applied.

that the best explanation of the contrast between the two responses is “a difference in the perception of moral properties—Norman’s experience represents the cat burning as *bad* whereas Pathos’s does not.”⁵³ What Werner evidently looks to forge in this case is a link between the representation of a moral property in a perceptual state and the kind of subjective response or signal that indicates that such a property has been encountered or represented in experience. In the terms I have staked out for MP, it seems that Werner believes the contrast case provided helps to explain the deep connection between RC and PC. His argumentation for this link between representation and the distinctive phenomenology of affective response is stated in short order, but the broad details do emerge. He argues through a kind of inference to the best explanation, that Norma’s physiological and affective reactions to CAT are best explained by the presence of a moral property. Werner argues plausibly that Norma’s experience of emotional discomfort and disgust only appears fitting because she has developed the disposition to be in such an experiential state that “more or less reliably tracks badness.”⁵⁴ He goes on to explain in a second observation that Norma’s affective response might be seen as “counterfactually correlated with *badness* (or at least a particular type of badness) in her local environment.” These two observations look to make the link between a moral property viz. general moral “badness”, and Norma’s particular emotional response a unique or determinative one. In other words, the particular empathic responses Norma might display as an observer in Harman’s CAT would not appear in a case involving another moral evaluation, say perceiving the moral praiseworthiness of honesty or truth telling when someone speaks the truth despite pressures to lie for instance. If Werner’s observation that Norma’s affective states reliably co-vary with moral properties in her perceptual environment, then this point would go a long way to securing

⁵³ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

PC. As we have seen, the principal issue at stake in PC is whether and in what sense we have “experiential reasons” to believe that moral properties may be represented in perception. Werner’s discussion of Norma suggests that we may have good reasons to think that the appearance of moral properties in the contents of perception does in fact produce identifiable and corresponding affective experiences. Norma is a normal case precisely because her supposed perception of badness can be linked to obvious, and apparently fitting, emotional responses.

Werner also responds insightfully to potential objections that might cast doubt on this tight relationship between moral properties and corresponding affective states. He treats four potential objections each of which purport to explain the contrast without appeal to perceptions of moral properties. One especially seductive alternative to Werner’s explanation of the contrast is simply to hold that the difference between Norma and Pathos’ experience can be fully accounted for without any appeal to representational content at all. Under this view, we might say that Norma and Pathos perceive exactly the same representational content when they see the cat being burned, and one does not see a moral property represented which the other lacks. The contrast may emerge instead simply because “Norma’s experience has some *raw feel*, some purely qualitative non-representational character, which Pathos’ experience lacks.”⁵⁵ Such an objection is potentially fatal to PC since the phenomenology of moral experience is allegedly tied directly to the presence of moral properties. Werner answers this objection by suggesting that it would imply a rejection of “intensionalism,” roughly the view that affective states supervene on or in some way proceed from representational states. It may be that affective states such as Norma’s discomfort or disgust are simply “raw feels,” but Werner suggests that this view needlessly departs from the plausible assumption that affective responses routinely have

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

“intentional objects.”⁵⁶ It seems that Norma’s discomfort is not simply a rootless feeling somehow experienced alongside the sight of a helpless animal being burned but a discomfort *at* or *in* seeing the cat being burned. The more phenomenologically responsible way to explain affective responses, then, must take into account how emotions follow from or are generated by representations. While I will not pursue the other objections to which Werner provides answers, these objections are united by the idea that even if affective states must be explained by representations there may be reasons to suppose that these representations may not involve moral properties. Werner considers in turn the objection that affective states follow from cognitive differences rather than perceptual ones, that the contrast may be explained by appeal to non-moral properties given in perception, or finally that different self-representations explain the contrast. Werner handles each of these claims charitably but concludes that each fails to account for the tight and apparently non-contingent relationship between Norma and Pathos’ perceptions and their affective responses. Only the supposition that Norma has genuinely perceived a moral property seems to explain the origin of her emotional response.

I argue that what emerges from Werner’s extended discussion of this contrast case is another robust defense of something like what I have identified as the “Phenomenological Claim” (PC) I believe is central to MP. Much like McBrayer, Chappell, and Watkins and Jolley, Werner concludes not simply that moral properties *may* be represented in experience but that they frequently are. Moreover, Werner argues, we often have good experiential indications of when we come into contact with such properties. If the contrast case proves nothing else, it demonstrates quite plausibly that affective response may be paired with the perception of moral properties. Such claims demonstrate in important ways how PC may function in defenses of MP. By advancing PC, the moral perceptionist looks to associate the representation of moral

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

properties to be a particular, first-person experience of what it's like to perceive such properties. Werner's use of Norma's moral experience in CAT provides such a candidate moral phenomenology. Norma's experience of a representation of badness generates or at least corresponds to the physiological and affective responses that Werner indicates. In effect, PC claims that moral properties, when perceived, should make an experiential difference. The contrasting case of Pathos, who lacks both a representation of moral badness and an affective response to CAT suggests quite clearly that moral properties may make a difference in this way.

While Robert Audi's handling of affect is more wide-ranging and less tightly focused than Werner's, a sympathetic reading of his *Moral Perception* reveals that he is concerned with many of the same issues. Audi, too, maintains that affect and emotional responses can play a justificatory or signaling role for the idea that observers have representations of moral properties. Though he does not use the term, Audi employs something like contrast examples to motivate the idea that affective responses can be integral to the perception of a moral property. He offers the example of an interviewer who is "unfairly inquisitive" when questioning another person. Audi argues that our observation that the interviewer has overstepped appropriate boundaries in questioning may produce feelings of "indignation." In this case, such indignation may serve as a kind of experiential signal that the interviewer is acting unfairly. Audi explains that the perception that the questioning is unfair "may be the central cognition in both eliciting and sustaining my indignation toward the interviewer."⁵⁷ Unlike Werner, Audi does not consider directly the contrasting case of an interview in which none of the questioning is unfair, but we may be able to anticipate that Audi would deny that such an interview would produce comparable feelings of indignation. In keeping with Werner's appropriation of CAT, however, Audi envisions an extremely tight and necessary link between the perceptions of certain moral

⁵⁷ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 133.

properties and phenomenal states with corresponding emotional or affective feels. He describes this relationship suggestively as a form of “phenomenal integration.” Integration may in fact be the most fitting term, for Audi suggests that our moral sensibilities often amount to a “felt sense of connection” between an impression of a moral property and the other properties which seem to ground or constitute the moral property.⁵⁸ Even when we may prove unable to articulate why witnessing a particular act solicits a certain affective response, instances of moral revulsion or outrage for instance suggest that this correlation is not accidental. As we have seen, it is this close and non-contingent connection between a moral property or quality and the phenomenal feel of a moral experience that underlies PC.

Audi’s treatment of emotion in *Moral Perception*, however, far outstrips the simple observation that the perceiving moral dimensions or qualities of a situation may generate certain affective responses. He demonstrates much more precisely how emotions may intersect with moral perception and subsequent moral judgments. In his understandings, emotions can be understood as multi-layered phenomena with not only “affective” but also “cognitive” and “motivational” dimensions each of which may figure in the process of moral perception or more deliberate forms of moral evaluation.⁵⁹ Audi confines discussion of the raw phenomenal or “experiential feel”—such as the indignation examined above or anger or repulsion—that may be occasioned by observing a moral situation to the category of “affect” proper.⁶⁰ Both Audi and Werner underscore the idea that this raw feel of what it’s like to experience anger at the sight of say a theft may be correlated in important and non-contingent ways such that the feeling itself is a kind of consequence or external sign that one has witnessed injustice. While Audi concedes

⁵⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

that the experience of a moral perception may routinely involve this kind of strongly experiential feeling, he does not believe that emotional responsive to is confined to such feelings.

Indeed, Audi goes to considerable length to examine how the emotional responsiveness integral to moral perception is considerably richer and more contentful than mere raw feels. By emphasizing the “cognitive” character of emotions, Audi does not intend that emotions can be reduced to or in some way identified with strongly cognitive states such as propositional beliefs. He observes rather that emotions may involve a “disposition to *form* such beliefs.”⁶¹ To support this line of thought that emotions can prefigure or predispose one to certain patterns of belief, Audi considers that all emotions involve a certain directedness to features of an object or situation. We do not—apart from evidently special cases that Audi fully recognizes—speak of being in a state of “fear” without at least implicit reference to some object or circumstance that excites such an emotion.⁶² We do not “fear” simply or absolutely, but we may easily “fear,” to use Audi’s example, a certain dog. If emotions rest on this kind of implicit directedness to an object, Audi reasons further, it is likely because we ascribe or recognize facts or contents about these object or situation. We may fear the dog, perhaps a pitbull, not because of a fully-formed propositional judgment that it is a dangerous breed, Audi thinks, but because of some pre-conceptual sense or intuition that the breed appears as threatening. In this way, Audi argues that emotions implicitly attribute some contents to objects or situations in ways that are distinct from full judgments but which may lead to fuller judgments. When this observation—however defensible it may prove to be—is applied to the case of moral perception, another dimension of the phenomenology of moral experience emerges. Rather than think that emotional

⁶¹ Ibid., 126.

⁶² Audi does recognize and examine briefly the case of apparently “free-floating anxiety” which lacks a readily identifiable, intentional object. See Audi, *Moral Perception*, 130.

responsiveness is exhausted by the literal emotional or experiential feelings undergone by an observer, we may imagine, along with Audi, that one who witnesses something like injustice may be predisposed in certain ways to recognize or later judge that injustice has occurred on the basis of such an emotion. By emphasizing this cognitive or attributive character of emotion, Audi adds additional depth to the sense in which emotions and representations of moral properties may co-exist and be causally connected.

A related though distinct consideration in Audi's treatment of emotional responsiveness is the intrinsic "motivational" force that seems to surround emotions aroused in moral cases. Audi takes it as relatively uncontroversial that emotions may motivate agents to action in ways that other mental or experiential states may fail to. Our own pre-theoretical intuitions about certain strong emotions may confirm that this is the case. Audi suggests that "in experiencing an emotion, such as fear, anger, or excitement, there will be something or other one wants, say to avoid the feared thing, to strike out at the object of anger, and to experience the exciting thing."⁶³ While Audi does not pursue the issue rigorously, he does offer a brief evolutionary speculation that emotions have their particular testifying and motivational value as an aide to survival. We may imagine that emotions such as fear can both signal the presence of a threat to survival and motivate individuals to take action to escape this threat or ensure survival in some other way.⁶⁴ Whatever the origin of emotions' motivational force, if one is willing to follow Audi's plausible assumption that to experience an emotion is typically to experience some inducement to act in a certain way, then this fact seems to represent a further feature of the phenomenology of moral experience. Our revulsion and desire to avoid the sight of children being dangerously misled, for example, may provide its own kind of proof that the deception at issue is morally wrong. By

⁶³ Ibid., 126-127.

⁶⁴ For this foray into evolutionary and ethical naturalism, see pp. 140-142.

correlating desired or observed behaviors, such as agents' decisions to intervene, avoid, or speak out against, certain behaviors, it may be possible to tie the motivations for these actions to specific moral properties or moral patterns of events.

My goal in sketching the diversity of positions surveyed above has been to make plain some common depictions of moral experience assumed among moral perceptionists. I have argued that perceptionists often rely on something approaching what I have termed the Phenomenological Claim (PC) in order to argue that moral properties actually do appear in various ways in experience. Culling relevant examples from proponents of MP, I suggested further that we might identify two broad orientations to how perceptionists understand the phenomenology of moral experience: an intellectual approach emphasizing recognition of moral properties and an affective approach highlighting the felt responses of agents to those properties. As I acknowledged at the outset, the idea that moral qualities generate or give rise to telltale experiential cues—intellectual or affective—seems to be one of the most natural and effective ways to motivate the idea of moral perception. The CAT thought experiment with which I began this study, and countless other cases of moral reaction to something heinous, invoke what might be taken as our natural intuition that we can recognize and respond to wrongdoing when we see it. Indeed, the kind of snap moral reactions or disgust evidenced in CAT and supported in this section are commonplace and they do provide strong suggestive evidence we may be in contact with moral properties in ways potentially as direct and undifferentiated as perception.

1.4 Moral Perception and Non-Inferentiality

The account of MP developed thus far—complete with its representational and phenomenological commitments—provides a characterization of a kind of possible moral experience, but I argue that were MP limited to this characterization it would remain importantly

incomplete. As we have seen, the Representational Claim (RC) is meant to do the crucial till work of making the perception of moral properties a live theoretical possibility in the context of representational mental states. MP advocates of course do not treat these perceptions as all of a piece, and the explorations of the Phenomenological Claim (PC) pursued in the preceding section point to a range of what such perceptions might be. By perceptions, MP advocates may intend, for example, the felt sense that a given situation is morally wrong revealed through an agent's emotional or affective responses. Perceptions may also take the form of recognitional mental states in which perceivers may have the sense that a given pattern of facts tokens something like injustice. Taken in tandem, RC and PC are suggestive and point to a range of moral experiences that might be characterized as perception. Arguably what is needed to augment this account of moral experience is a more direct attempt to explain why such moral experiences have the true character and immediacy of perceptions. To state the matter differently, what MP seems to require is a plausible account of why the moral experiences suggested above deserve to be reckoned as perceptions and not say implicit inferences, later judgments from moral principles, or even learned moral associations from a surrounding culture. I suggest that perceptionists rely on a final Epistemological Claim (EC) to help bolster this view that our encounters with moral properties are genuine and robust perceptions.

For the purpose of clarity, let us recall EC in its full form: "Both the initial perception of moral properties and the fuller moral judgments or appraisals that may result from these perceptions are non-inferential and do not depend upon an agent's taking non-moral facts as premises."⁶⁵ This emphasis on non-inferentiality dots recent defenses of MP, and I suggest that it does arguably the most concerted work in the literature to help bolster the notion that MP

⁶⁵ See § 1.1 above.

offers a truly perceptual account of moral knowledge. It should be plain that the epistemological claim I have framed here sees non-inferentiality operating in several related though distinct ways. On the one hand, EC highlights the fact that for moral perceptionists, the emotional or mental states that represent or respond to moral properties are not derived in some way by a process of inference. MP proponents have argued that when we undergo mental states which represent moral properties, we do not form this moral sense by some kind of survey or deduction from the non-moral contents of our perception or from some kind of implicit judgment informed by external moral principles. EC holds rather that our perceptions of moral properties are principally simple, immediate, and undifferentiated acts. A second—and typically less developed—facet of EC concerns the relation between immediate moral perceptions and more deliberate or propositional judgments that a given situation is morally unjust, wrong, etc. Given a moral sense or strong affective response that the burning of a cat is immoral, we may still wonder how this primitive moral sense relates to the kind of fuller judgment in CAT that “what the hoodlums are doing is wrong.” The latter portion of EC indicates that this grounding relationship between our perceptions of moral properties and subsequent judgments is similarly non-inferential. Not without some reason, moral perceptionists are keen to argue that our perceptions of moral properties often shade naturally into moral judgments or appraisals without the need to explicitly reason how perceptions underwrite or warrant those judgments. By emphasizing non-inferentiality operative at both these levels, then, MP advocates look to cast moral perceptions as comparable in simplicity and directness to sense perceptions.

Before considering more squarely defenses of non-inferentiality in the MP literature, I pause here to give some initial characterization of “non-inferentiality” itself. Though this term is much trafficked in defenses of MP, precise treatment of the concept is difficult to find. In some

cases, however, readers get insight into the term by explicit contrast with knowledge gained by “inference.” Timothy Chappell, for example, notes that inference is “active” and volitional whereas perception is “passive” since our perceptions seem to be entirely unbidden and impinge upon us without being solicited in any way. We may choose where to look, but it is not clear that we could choose to see. He adds that perception is comparatively more “quick” or “instantaneous” than inference.⁶⁶ Perceptual states enjoy such immediacy because they are self-contained and rely on no inferential chains of any length. “To perform an inference,” Chappell explains, “is, normally, to run through a number of steps of reasoning, whereas perceiving something is a step-less, instantaneous whole.”⁶⁷

We may augment this account of non-inferentiality with more precise discussions of the term advanced in other venues or metaethical contexts.⁶⁸ When many metaethicists describe a belief state or judgment as non-inferential, they frequently mean that the belief “is not held on the basis of premises” or that it is not held because of any “consciously accessible inference”—explicit or implicit.⁶⁹ Such a view does not deny the possibility that some of our moral judgments or beliefs may be formed by inference or deliberate reflection, but it does hold that at least one mode of gaining moral knowledge frequently does not rely on these processes. It seems that we reach moral beliefs in most cases quite independently of our ability to justify in the process or even to explain after the fact the grounds of these beliefs. I demonstrate below that

⁶⁶ Chappell, 427.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ I reference here principally work done among “moral intuitionists.” Despite what are arguably significant points of departure from MP, intuitionists share the belief that at least some moral judgments or appraisals are importantly non-inferential.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Tropman, “Renewing Moral Intuitionism,” 443; see also, Elizabeth Tropman, “Non-Inferential Moral Knowledge,” *Acta Analytica*, 26, no. 4 (2011): 355-366 and Elizabeth Tropman, “Can Cornell Moral Realism Adequately Account for Moral Knowledge?” *Theoria* 78, no. 1 (2012): 26-46.

the commitment of EC to both non-inferentiality of moral perceptions and judgments implies a similar independence from premises, warrant, or justification.

Of particular concern to proponents of MP has been to establish moral perceptions as somehow distinct from judgments formed by inference from non-moral facts. Evidently what moral perceptionists look to combat is the charge that moral perceptions may be reductively explained as inferences from non-moral facts. If it could be proven that when we perceive a property such as injustice that what we truly perceive are a particular set of circumstances or empirical facts which we later denominate as unjust then admittedly we do not truly perceive the moral property but only determine that it is present through some mediated reflection. With this critique in mind, MP advocates have stressed the independence of moral perceptions from any inferences from non-moral facts. Sarah McGrath's full statement of MP demonstrates this fact: "We have some moral knowledge by perceiving moral facts, and this perceptual knowledge does not rest on non-moral evidence."⁷⁰ When we perceive something like a "red apple," there is no need to appeal to a train of inferences that justify this perception since the perception itself seems to be self-attesting and credible apart from any non-moral evidence or explanation. The kind of moral perceptions which MP proponents defend apparently share this character. McGrath argues that many moral perceptions appear to be importantly distinct from any kind of rational justification and inaccessible to some chain of reasoning that might otherwise explain them. In the end, McGrath finds that what is most distinctive about MP is that "it holds that we can know moral facts without having (distinct) evidence for them."⁷¹

Following McGrath, more recent moral perceptionists have described the non-inferentiality of moral perceptions in similar terms as a form of epistemic independence from

⁷⁰ McGrath, 224.

⁷¹ Ibid.

non-moral facts. Andrew Cullison’s account of non-inferentiality, for example, emphasizes that moral perceptions rest on a kind of stable and implicit correlation between certain simple non-moral properties and more complex moral ones. He owns that “it is very difficult to specify what the connection” is between non-moral facts and moral properties.⁷² Despite this difficulty, Cullison argues that the correlation can be distinguished from anything like “identity” or “strong supervenience.”⁷³ What Cullison wants to avoid are efforts to identify a particular moral property, say justice, with some finite set of non-moral properties or facts that might obtain in the world. He argues instead that the correlation between non-moral facts and moral properties is more contingent and accidental than identity or strict supervenience. In Cullison’s understanding, there may be regular correlations between properties A and B such that “perception of A is good enough to have *basic* perceptual knowledge that B is present.”⁷⁴ Curiously, Cullison provides only non-moral illustrations. He explains that if one’s mother-in-law regularly stocks the refrigerator with salami when she comes to town, then there is stable or regular correlation such that the perception of salami in the refrigerator may produce the knowledge that one’s mother-in-law is in town. Cullison evidently thinks that certain moral properties are correlated to non-moral facts or properties in exactly this way so that perceiving the non-moral facts is *ipso facto* to have perceived of a moral property. Most tellingly this implicit move from non-moral properties to moral ones is putatively “basic” or “non-inferential.” Cullison’s treatment of this relationship leaves much unsaid, but it is clear that it looks to uphold the basic claim of what I have been calling EC that moral perception does not rely on inference from non-moral facts.⁷⁵

⁷² Cullison, 163.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

Robert Audi's monograph provides the most sustained discussion how MP relies on non-inferential perceptions. In Audi's understanding, much of our perception of complex properties—including moral ones—occurs prior to conceptual or propositional judgment. It is these pre-judgment apprehensions or recognitions that Audi describes as non-inferential. He maintains that MP is committed minimally to the claim that “for some moral knowledge, we need not posit an inference, as opposed to belief-formation that is a direct response to a recognized pattern.”⁷⁶ Audi argues that cases of such direct responses to patterns of facts are legion. If one witnesses a judge issue a particularly harsh sentence, he explains, “we may have a sense of its unfittingness to the crime even prior to our forming—our without our forming—a belief, on that basis, that the sentence is unjust.”⁷⁷ The pre-propositional sense of injustice, must be non-inferential in the sense suggested by EC because it is not the product of any form of reasoning from non-moral premises. It should be noted that for Audi, this sense of injustice that may occur prior to conceptual or propositional judgment is identified by the kind of affective responses explored in the preceding section. Audi does not deny that many of these perceptions could also be justified independently by inference, but by pointing to our ability to recognize moral properties independently of issuing moral judgments, his work creates a space for a kind of non-inferential moral perception. As we have seen, such perceptions are EC's central finding.

Audi also delivers a more precise account of the relationship between non-moral properties and moral properties according to MP. Despite the claim that we can perceive moral

⁷⁵ I suspect that there are real problems lurking here in Cullison's example. Many readers, including this one, will find that Cullison does not adequately pursue the extent to which inferences may be rapid and implicit. His example of the reasoning from the sight of salami in the refrigerator to a knowledge that his mother-in-law is in town, for example, might easily be explained as a kind of implicit inference informed by past observations of this connection between deli meats and one's in-laws.

⁷⁶ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

properties, defenders of MP do not maintain that we perceive something like free floating injustice but only that particular acts of say discrimination are unjust. If moral perceptions are thus dependent on non-moral facts, they are nonetheless importantly distinct from them. Audi explicates this particular form of limited dependence, noting that moral perceptions are “epistemically” dependent upon non-moral considerations though not inferentially.⁷⁸ We may say, along with Audi, that “moral perception always comes by way of non-moral perception” and that our moral perceptions are dependent upon non-moral content in a broad sense. However, Audi is equally clear that despite this dependence, non-moral facts do not directly justify or warrant moral perceptions. He maintains that the relationship that obtains between moral properties and the non-moral contents of perception is not “causal” or “instrumental” in this way but rather “*constitutive*.”⁷⁹ By invoking the phenomenological language of constitution, Audi offers a way to skirt the problem of explaining how non-moral facts generate or give rise to moral evaluations. If non-moral facts constitute moral properties, then to perceive these non-moral facts is, in some meaningful sense, to perceive the moral properties themselves. Where previous authors had only gestured at the relationship between non-moral facts and moral perceptions, Audi’s notion of constitution provides a more precise account and places the broader claim of non-inferentiality suggested in EC on firmer footing.

To illustrate this notion of constitution and how it bears on the issue of non-inferentiality, consider Audi’s own example of facial recognition. Much like Chappell before him, Audi treats the perception of a complex property such as facial identity as a form of pattern recognition. When we claim to see “Karl” approaching, he explains, we do so because we recognize the unique pattern of shapes, colors, and spatial distances of Karl’s distinctive facial features.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 58.

“Facial recognition,” Audi explains, “depends on seeing the features of the face” and our ability to recognize Karl may falter when certain parts of his face are distorted or obscured in some way. If the perception of a face depends on perceiving simpler sensory properties, our recognition that it is Karl’s face “is not dependent on *inference* from the relevant features.”⁸⁰ Audi wants to say that we recognize Karl in one single and undifferentiated act. We do not consciously attend all of the facial features and then reason that this set of simple properties belongs to Karl. It seems in such cases that our perception of these individual facial features simultaneously constitutes a broader recognition of Karl’s face. Audi imagines a similar relation between non-moral facts and moral properties, and he argues “I see no good reason not to speak of moral perception if we can speak of facial perception.”⁸¹ Audi contends that just as our perception of a face from facial features is instantaneous, there are certainly cases where we perceive a set of non-moral events and their moral wrongness. “It is by being a stabbing of a helpless old man,” Audi imagines, “that the deed seen (at least partly) constitutes a wrongdoing.”⁸² By this use of constitution, Audi looks to collapse the conceptual distance between non-moral facts and moral appraisals or judgments and to make their relation more immediate. If non-moral elements do not furnish premises or causal reasons instrumental in making moral judgments, Audi’s constitution language demonstrates how agents can perceive moral wrongness in and through these non-moral facts. Moreover, if non-moral facts constitute moral properties, then moral perceptions can be readily explained as the simple, undifferentiated, and non-inferential acts assumed by EC.

Armed with this basic understanding of the goals and general shape of non-inferentiality in defenses of MP, we can now consider more directly some of the reasons that MP advocates

⁸⁰ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 53.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 58.

have put forth as evidence that our perceptions truly are non-inferential. One of the cardinal reasons to suppose that our moral perceptions are non-inferential is the fact that they do not seem to be the result of any inferential inference. Jim's experience of perceiving the moral wrongness in CAT, for instance, does not appear to rely on inference. When Jim rounds the corner he does not catalog the scene in front of him, noting the non-moral facts and actors at play, before reasoning his way to some sense or feeling of immorality. He seems rather to see through the scene before him and grasps its immorality in one quick and undifferentiated perception. Moral perceptionists take this basic intuition that our moral reactions do not appear to be products of inference as one indication that they truly are non-inferential.

Phenomenological scarcity may provide some indication that moral perceptions do not rely on inference, yet critics would likely retort that inferences may not appear in conscious experience because they are rapid and implicit. An argument put forth by Sarah McGrath, however, looks to demonstrate still more directly that moral perceptions can be independent of inference. McGrath offers the case of Alice who holds the moral belief that "homosexuality is wrong" on the basis of scriptural denunciations of homosexual practice and her belief in the authority of those scriptures.⁸³ When Alice encounters Bob and Chuck, however, she eventually comes to form a revised belief that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality. McGrath treats this revised belief as non-inferential since it cannot be explained by appeal to any prior moral commitments that Alice holds. Indeed, Alice's more considered moral opinions are averse to homosexuality. She comes to accept Bob and Chuck's relationship through her acquaintance with them and not because of inferences—explicit or implicit—from her background moral principles. The case of Alice is interesting because it seems to drive a wedge between Alice's moral perceptions or beliefs and any rational justifications that might be thought to explain them.

⁸³ McGrath, 224-225.

Alice's conclusion that homosexuality is morally unproblematic departs so dramatically from her prior moral premises that it is difficult to imagine that these premises played any appreciable role in the formation of her revised belief.

The work of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt lends further support to this notion that in many cases, our moral perceptions or appraisals appear independent of justificatory inferences. Haidt takes steady aim at what he argues is the profound "rationalism" of existing moral psychology which holds that moral evaluations are products of "a process of reasoning and reflection."⁸⁴ Haidt argues at length that wholly apart from this reasoning process, our moral judgments are more commonly the product of "quick moral intuitions" and are only followed when necessary by "slow, ex post facto moral reasoning."⁸⁵ Haidt's model of "social intuitionism" effectively stands the rationalist narrative of moral judgment on its head by arguing that moral reasoning is not a cause but a later consequence of judgments made by other means. To cast doubt on the importance of reason and inference in moral judgment, Haidt explores several ways in which moral reasoning fails to align with moral judgments. He reveals experimental evidence to suggest that moral reasoning is often quick and instantaneous and that reasoning often functions merely to these moral reactions. Haidt argues further that moral reasoning often begins only when intuitive or emotional judgments seem to need support. Much like McGrath's handling of Alice, Haidt's analysis underscores the point that moral evaluations are often quite separable from explicit moral reasoning. If Haidt is correct then our first and principal mode of moral experience is by quick reactions or intuitions rather than any more cognitive evaluation or intellectual process.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 817.

The authors examined above provide what are arguably good reasons to suppose that our initial moral perceptions—if they exist—can safely be considered non-inferential. We must now consider the second portion of the claim made in EC viz. the moral judgments or beliefs that rest on perceptions of moral properties are similarly non-inferential. This latter claim appears vital for MP since it is equally a theory of non-inferential moral knowledge as it is a narrow claim about moral perception. If an agent's final moral judgments were traced to inferences of some sort or other, MP would potentially be compatible with any non-perceptual explanation of moral knowledge. Michael Huemer, however, provides compelling reasons to think that our moral judgments are actually non-inferential. His work suggests that if a moral perception were a kind of direct contact with a moral property, then this experience would shade automatically into a judgment that the moral property applies in a given case.⁸⁶ If for example, I were to have a spontaneous moral perception that inflicting pain on animals for fun is morally abhorrent, this experiential contact with the moral property seems sufficient to explain my judgment that this kind of torture truly is wrong. In other words, it seems unlikely that an agent first perceives a moral property and then resorts to inference to make the final judgment that the particular circumstance in question has that moral property or quality. The perception of the moral property does not, then, seem to function as a kind of evidence for judgment. Huemer explains that moral perceptions or intuitions are transparent in the sense that we simply see through them to the truth of some moral judgment. In my view, this kind of transparency provides at least a provisional reason to think that moral judgments too are non-inferential. Much more will be said of this transparency and Huemer's argumentation for it section 2.3.1 below.

Despite variations in emphasis and depth of presentation, I have argued in this section that all recent defenses of MP appear committed to something like the Epistemological Claim I

⁸⁶ See, for example, Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 121.

have identified above. As we have seen, the central motivation of EC is to explain why our moral perceptions and evaluations have the distinctive immediacy and directness associated with other forms of perception. I have maintained that proponents of MP roundly agree that moral perceptions are true perceptions because they are decidedly non-inferential. While the perception of a moral property is inextricably tied to the perception of non-moral facts or circumstances, it is not caused or otherwise justified by appeal to these non-moral facts. Moral perceptionists have thus sought to link the perception of non-moral circumstances and moral appraisals. In the terms set out by some of the literature examined above, our perception of non-moral facts and moral properties are part and parcel of the same simple, direct, and undifferentiated act. By demonstrating how moral properties and judgments relate non-inferentially to other contents of our perceptions, MP advocates look to provide some indication of why we can speak of our experience of moral properties as perceptions.

1.5 Summary Statement of MP

It has been my burden in this first chapter to bring some clarity to a view that some moral epistemologists have developed under the heading of moral perception. I noted at the outset, this is no easy task and this chapter should not be taken as a straightforward “literature review” or a simple recounting of a stable and predictable literature. Defenses of MP are still in their early stages, and I have sought—perhaps even been forced—to interpret MP and to render precise what are often only suggestions of what moral perception *may* be like. As I have understood it, MP is simultaneously the claim that the contents of our perceptions may include moral properties and that an agent’s moral beliefs may proceed non-inferentially from perceptions of these properties. I have argued further that this moral epistemology appears to rely on subsidiary claims. For anything like MP to get off the ground, I suggest that it must defend the idea that

moral properties might in principle be found in the contents of perception, that we may have experiential evidence to suggest that such properties are perceived, and finally that our perceptions of these properties are as direct, immediate, and unbidden as other sorts of perceptions. In other words, recent defenses of MP invoke something like the representational, phenomenological, and epistemological claims detailed above. Taken collectively, these three claims help to ground MP argumentatively. Moreover, any moral perception that satisfies these claims seems likely to contribute to credible ethical beliefs.

RECASTING MP AS MORAL INTUITIONISM

2.1 Moral Perception and Intersections with Intuitionism

The interpretive survey of MP undertaken in the previous chapter has, I hope, proven useful for getting clear on the principal features of the view. The considerable time undertaken to parse MP into its representational, phenomenological, and epistemological commitments will offer the further benefit of highlighting various points of entry through which we might begin to assess its coherence and future prospects. While scholars in different disciplines—perhaps the philosophy of perception or moral psychology—may reasonably find the Representational Claim (RC) or the Phenomenological Claim (PC) to be its distinguishing features, I maintain that it is the Epistemological Claim (EC) that should have pride of place in interpreting the promises or shortcomings of MP. By arguing that moral perceptions are immediate, direct, and unbidden, MP advocates arguably do the most work to build a bridge between sensory perception and moral experience. By emphasizing such non-inferentiality, however, moral perceptionists also invite obvious comparisons between MP and a more established moral epistemology whose distinguishing claim is similarly that moral beliefs are non-inferential: moral intuitionism.

In my judgment, more work is needed to clarify the relationship and points of overlap between MP and various types of intuitionism. The fact that some moral perceptionists draw obvious inspiration from intuitionist accounts of non-inferential moral belief—or, in the case of Robert Audi, are themselves leading intuitionists—raises significant questions for the future of MP as a distinct view. If MP relies on the explanatory resources of intuitionism how distinct are the positions? If moral perceptions are paradigm cases of non-inferential moral beliefs, is there any risk in designating them intuitions? Does MP risk collapsing into a form of intuitionism? I

dedicate this second chapter to exploring such questions and to assessing this emerging relationship between MP and intuitionism. I will argue positively that rather than representing a novel or distinct moral epistemology, MP is in fact continuous and interchangeable with intuitionism. I maintain more particularly that MP is potentially consonant with a relatively new form of intuitionism that has come to be known as appearance intuitionism. By the end of this chapter, I hope to have made good on this claim by setting forth a revised version of appearance intuitionism that—enlisting a term previously claimed by Robert Cowan—I shall be calling “Perceptual Intuitionism” (PI). I argue that if properly articulated, something like Perceptual Intuitionism is all but indistinguishable from MP.

I develop this central argument in stages, and the plan for this chapter is accordingly as follows. In the remainder of this first section i.e. 2.1, I look to motivate the suggestion above that it is the Epistemological Claim (EC) which is the cardinal feature of MP and that this claim brings MP into the orbit of, if not a collision course with, moral intuitionism. I will demonstrate below that the non-inferentiality of moral beliefs claimed in EC is frequently identified as the distinguishing feature of MP by moral perceptionists themselves and that many of these authors are indebted to intuitionist characterizations of non-inferentiality. In section 2.2, I provide a brief account of moral intuitionism itself to orient the reader, drawing particular attention to some recent work in appearance intuitionism. In section 2.3, I leave these preliminaries behind and make the positive case that intuitionism and moral perception can be brought together or reconciled. Here I draw on a helpful analogy advanced by Michael Huemer. Huemer construes both ethical intuitions and sensory perceptions as epistemological analogues since each are ways of accessing a mind independent domain of properties. I then build upon this analogy and suggest how appearance intuitionism can be extended in ways that would capture much of what

the MP model is supposed to explain from moral experience. I conclude in section 2.4 by attempting to answer potential objections likely to surround this comparison between moral perception and appearance intuitionism as I am prepared to draw it.

Before passing to these more critical stages of the argument, I feel obliged to end this first section with some effort to justify the initial claims upon which that argument itself is premised. I have noted that it is the Epistemological Claim (EC) that I believe is most central to MP, and this claim may be disputed. Yet I think I am on relatively safe ground with this assertion since I am not alone in viewing non-inferentiality as definitive of MP. I urge that a privileging of non-inferentiality is evident in the MP literature itself. Sarah McGrath's work, for example, suggests that stripped of the claim that our moral perceptions are immediate and non-inferential, MP would not represent a unique moral epistemology. To underscore this point, McGrath considers and then rejects a more minimal statement of MP emphasizing the simple perception of moral properties: "We have some moral knowledge by perceiving moral facts."⁸⁷ The perception of moral facts certainly lies at the very heart of MP, but McGrath finds that this sparing definition of moral perception is too permissive. Such a definition, McGrath explains, is problematic because it is hardly controversial but rather is "obviously *true*."⁸⁸

McGrath's worry is evidently that when "moral perception" is construed so broadly or imprecisely, there may be few accounts of moral belief or knowledge that could not be considered a form of moral perception. Indeed, many obviously non-perceptual epistemologies could lay claim to "perceiving" moral facts in some broad sense. As a case in point, McGrath recalls the earlier—and to her mind deficient—formulation of a version of MP by Watkins and

⁸⁷ McGrath identifies this sparing statement of MP as "PA1" to indicate that it is merely a provisional definition or "first pass." See McGrath, 220. I have already treated McGrath's more considered definition of what I have been calling MP in the previous chapter. See § 1.1 above.

⁸⁸ McGrath, 221. Emphasis in original.

Jolley. These authors had claimed perception of moral properties was possible via “an intellectualized perceptual ability.”⁸⁹ When Watkins and Jolley speak of moral perception, they evidently mean some acquired, cognitive ability to discriminate the moral facts of a situation. Such a view clearly turns on a more metaphorical sense of “perception.” McGrath multiplies examples of epistemological models in which moral “perception” takes on this more figurative cast. She notes that someone who views the process of moral appraisal as a kind of inference to the best explanation in which sensory facts form the raw material for later inference or judgment might think this amounts to “perceiving” moral facts in some relevant sense. McGrath’s chosen examples serve to make the point that in order to define MP more narrowly, moral perceptionists must claim more than that agents may perceive moral properties. It seems that perceptionist must stake some further claim to *how* these properties are perceived and why some modes of perception deserve to be esteemed as legitimate and others do not.

As I have demonstrated at length in the preceding chapter, McGrath and later perceptionists find non-inferentiality to be the definitive feature of genuine moral perceptions. I will reaffirm this point here, but I call readers’ attentions not just to the conclusion that moral perceptions must be non-inferential but also to the sources and inspirations of this key doctrine in MP. In a section suggestively titled “A digression on intuitionism,” for example, McGrath displays a clear debt to intuitionism’s understanding of moral knowledge.⁹⁰ Drawing on the work of intuitionist Robert Audi—whom readers will likely recognize from the discussions above—McGrath explains that like MP, intuitionism suggests that moral beliefs often arise

⁸⁹ See Watkins and Jolley, 77. Though it is difficult to tell from McGrath’s brief characterization, Watkins and Jolley do admit a place for empirical perception in their accounts of MP. They suggest that the ability to discriminate or discern the moral facts of a situation begins with simple perception but must be “augmented by intellect.”

⁹⁰ See McGrath, 222-224.

independently of rational reflection. She quotes approvingly Audi's descriptions of moral intuitions as "non-inferential" belief states. McGrath takes this idea of non-inferentiality that typifies moral intuitions and argues that it also serves as a useful trait for "marking off the perceptual view" represented by MP.⁹¹ This point will be familiar since it is precisely this claim that is made in EC. For the moral perceptionist, genuine moral perceptions are putatively "non-inferential" precisely because they are not based on rational reflection in much the same way presumed by moral intuitionists. While McGrath does not self-identify as an intuitionist, it is clear that she is quite sympathetic to intuitionism and she observes openly that intuitionism is "a view that is in some respects similar to the perceptual view."⁹² I submit that McGrath's early work on MP gives some credibility to the agenda I have proposed for this chapter. Her article provides good reason to think that non-inferentiality is the cardinal feature of MP and that by foregrounding non-inferentiality in this way, MP bears real similarities to moral intuitionism.

The intersections of intuitionism and moral perception neatly displayed in McGrath's work continue among more recent advocates of MP. McGrath's own intuitionist muse, Robert Audi, sees his explorations of moral perception as compatible with his intuitionism. In his view, there are obvious ways in which we might conceive "intuitions as analogous to perceptions."⁹³ Audi's analysis on this point is detailed, but he emphasizes generally that both intuitions and perceptions are characteristically "direct responses" to something an agent may see or consider.⁹⁴ Our perception that a table has a certain color or hue seems to be unsolicited and simply emerges as a response to the object. Similarly, our intuitive sense that a parent who strikes a child has

⁹¹ Ibid., 223.

⁹² Ibid., 222.

⁹³ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 88.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93.

acted wrongly often appears as a kind of immediate response to witnessing the situation. Even more tellingly, Robert Cowan has argued that moral perception may amount to a particular species of intuitionism. Under the heading of what he terms “Perceptual Intuitionism,” Cowan suggests that if successful, MP “promises to constitute an independent...intuitionist epistemology.”⁹⁵ Cowan’s considered opinion is that what I have been calling MP does not succeed entirely as an “independent” form of intuitionism and that it cannot be understood apart from the “adequacy of other forms of intuitionism.”⁹⁶ In any case, Cowan clearly interprets MP not as a distinctly new moral epistemology but as an outworking of some version of intuitionism.

I join Robert Cowan in thinking that MP and moral intuitionism are more than casually related, and like Cowan, I will argue that MP may be best articulated as a particular form of intuitionism. In this first section, however, I have tried to make clear that the comparison between MP and intuitionism is well motivated and proceeds naturally from the MP literature. My suggestion that it is the Epistemological Claim (EC) which should command greatest interest in interpreting MP seems a humble one given explicit avowals that non-inferentiality is the *sine qua non* of the view. My comparison between MP and intuitionism is similarly well grounded since moral perceptionists draw consciously on intuitionist accounts of moral knowledge. Perceptionists clearly find the characterizations of moral intuitions as non-inferential useful in framing their accounts of moral belief. I will be arguing that these appropriations of intuitionist themes are only too successful. Once the positive comparison between MP and moral intuitionism is raised, it is a fair question to ask how distinct are the views and if there are

⁹⁵ Robert Cowan, “Perceptual Intuitionism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 1 (2015): 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

compelling reasons to think MP adds more to accounts of moral knowledge than intuitionism? I answer both questions negatively below.

2.2 Moral Intuitionism: An Initial Statement

Before developing the central argument of this chapter sketched above, I pause here to consider moral intuitionism since it is that view which dominates the discussions to follow. The term “moral intuitionism”—like most labels in philosophy—is a freighted designation, for it has been used to describe positions across the Anglophone world for over a century. Despite numerous historical and regional inflections, moral intuitionists share the basic *credo* that agents can have at least some moral knowledge or justified moral beliefs non-inferentially.⁹⁷ Readers will recall from the discussion of the Epistemological Claim (EC) pursued in the previous chapter that to claim that a belief or knowledge-state is non-inferential is to say it is based upon no inferences—explicit or implicit—from prior justificatory reasons. While moral intuitionism may also be identified by other standard commitments—classically ethical pluralism, moral realism, cognitivism, or non-naturalism—it is first and foremost a distinctive moral epistemology.⁹⁸ Intuitionism, like MP, promises answers to basic questions about the nature, sources, and justifications of our moral beliefs.

While intuitionists roundly affirm that at least some moral knowledge is non-inferential, they diverge significantly in their characterizations of non-inferentiality itself and the role it

⁹⁷ For recent characterizations of moral intuitionism, see Elizabeth Tropman, “Varieties of Moral Intuitionism,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 48, no. 2 (2014): 177-194; Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, chapter 5; Philip Stratton-Lake, introduction to *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-evaluations*, ed. Philip Stratton-Lake (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2002), 1-28; Jill Graper Hernandez, ed., *The New Intuitionism* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2011).

⁹⁸ I am indebted to Philip Stratton-Lake for this catalog of common associations with intuitionism, See Stratton-Lake, 1-2. I depart, however, from his division of intuitionism into “methodological” and “epistemological” varieties. Stratton-Lake classes Ross, for example as a “methodological” intuitionist since Ross was an ethical pluralist who posited a collection of first moral principles that may come into conflict with one another. I abandon this distinction since I think it is plainly evident that Ross and like-minded pluralists are nonetheless still intuitionists of the “epistemological” sort as well.

plays in the justification of moral beliefs.⁹⁹ Several distinct strands of intuitionism have developed around competing understandings of these issues. We may identify first a broadly “rationalist” intuitionism as the most established tradition in the field. This orientation to intuitionism emerged among some of the earliest exponents of the view in Britain—particularly G.E. Moore, W.D. Ross, H.A. Prichard, and Henry Sidgwick—but it has received contemporary revision by scholars such as Robert Audi and Russ Shafer-Landau.¹⁰⁰ Rationalist intuitionists hold that at least some moral beliefs are held non-inferentially because they are simply self-evident. We may enlist a classic example from W.D. Ross to illustrate this point. The moral belief that promise keeping is *prima facie* right—i.e. that fidelity to one’s promises is always at least conditionally morally appropriate—does not seem to stand in need of any further proof. Ross explains “that an act, *qua* fulfilling a promise...is *prima facie* right is self-evident.”¹⁰¹ Ross is careful to note that the self-evidence of a moral belief does not imply that the belief is somehow innate. Rather, a belief can be said to be self-evident when “we have given sufficient attention to the proposition it is evident without any need of proof, or of evidence beyond itself.”¹⁰² While some theorists advance different notions of self-evidence, rationalist intuitionists of any stripe share the view some moral beliefs may be seen as presumptively true on their face.

⁹⁹ I draw here on Tropman’s helpful taxonomy of forms of intuitionism. See Tropman, “Varieties of Moral Intuitionism,” 178.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Robert Audi, *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuitionism and Intrinsic Value* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Much of Shafer-Landau’s work treats non-epistemological issues related to moral realism, but his defense of “self-evidence” as an explanation for the justification of moral propositions marks him clearly as a rationalist in the sense described above. See Shafer-Landau, chapter 11.

¹⁰¹ W.D. Ross, “What Makes Acts Right,” in James Rachels ed., *Ethical Theory 2: Theories About How We Should Live* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28; This selection is reprinted from W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 16-41.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

A more recent and countervailing strand of intuitionism can be identified as “response intuitionism.” Response intuitionism departs noticeably from the strongly intellectual or cognitive bent of rationalist intuitionists to examine how an agent’s intuitions may be rooted in affective or emotional responses to situations. Theorists such as Sabine Roeser, for instance, observe that moral intuitions often appear as certain felt responses to situations. After witnessing a parent strike a child, for instance, one may feel a sense of moral outrage along with spontaneous belief that “child abuse is morally wrong.” According to Roeser, this emotional responsiveness is not some later or adventitious consequence of an intuition. We do not intuit that the parent has acted wrongly and then experience emotional discomfort. For response intuitionists like Roeser, intuitions and affective responses are mutually implicated in one another.¹⁰³ Roeser explains that “moral emotions understood as (potentially) felt value judgments can play the role that intuitions...play for traditional intuitionists.”¹⁰⁴ Intuitions are often indistinguishable from emotions and together they form non-doxastic affective responses that underlie moral knowledge. Such responses may predispose an agent to judge in certain directions, but these responses are not premises for belief formation.

I believe that much of MP is potentially consonant with both rationalist and response intuitionism, but I suspect that it bears most similarities to a comparatively recent expression of intuitionism known as appearance intuitionism. Michael Huemer is arguably the chief exponent of this new orientation to intuitionism. While Huemer develops this view with considerable sophistication, it’s origins lie in the simple principle of what he terms “Phenomenal Conservatism.” This principle holds that “other things being equal, it is reasonable to assume

¹⁰³ This tight integration between intuitionism and affective responses is why Roeser identifies her own version of response intuitionism as “Affectual Intuitionism.” See Sabine Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), xv.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

that things are the way they appear.”¹⁰⁵ When Huemer invokes the word “appearance” he refers generally to mental states in which something seems to be true apart from reflective analysis or judgment. We may say, for example, that when we spot a stick in water, that the length of the stick “appears” or “seems” to be bent as it enters the water.¹⁰⁶ Construed broadly, Huemer argues, these sorts of appearances or seeming states feature in everything from perception and memory to introspection and intellection. More tellingly, however, Huemer argues that our ethical intuitions have the character of appearances. Without forming a specific or reasoned moral judgment, he explains, it may simply seem that ethical propositions such as “courage, benevolence, and honesty are virtues” is true.¹⁰⁷

According to Huemer, our ethical intuitions are in fact “appearances” of a narrow or particular sort. He states compactly that a moral intuition is simply an “initial, *intellectual* appearance.”¹⁰⁸ When an agent has the intuition that promise keeping is morally praiseworthy, enlisting Ross’ earlier example, Huemer suggests that this intuition is essentially a mental state in which the proposition “promise keeping is morally right” seems to be true prior to reasoning. This characterization of appearances as “intellectual” marks Huemer’s form of intuitionism as much closer to rationalist intuitionism than the kinds of emotional or affective responses presumed in response intuitionism. Huemer in fact shares the suspicion of some skeptics that “our moral intuitions may be biased by emotions and personal interests.”¹⁰⁹ By casting intuitions

¹⁰⁵ Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ For another classic example of a deceptive “appearance,” consider the Müller-Lyer illusion in which two line with terminals appear of different lengths despite being identical. For a reproduction of this image, see Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 100.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Michael Huemer, “Revisionary Intuitionism,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 25, no. 1 (2008): 377.

as intellectual appearances, Huemer effectively blocks the appeals to emotion that typify response intuitionism. Even among intellectual appearances, however, Huemer ultimately argues that only a subset prove reliable as intuitions. He puts forward “abstract”-“formal” intuitions as the kind of seeming or appearance states which are most reliable. Abstract intuitions are those which concern the most general moral principles such as “the right action is always the action that has the best overall consequences.”¹¹⁰ Formal intuitions are more general still in that they provide constraints for ethical theorizing without actually affirming or denying an explicitly moral principle. A sample formal intuition such as “If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z ” bears no explicit relation to ethics or morality. When Huemer defends the claim that our intuitions are intellectual appearances, he evidently has in mind these sorts of very general and formal principles over both the affective states of response intuitionism and even the more particular moral principles of many rationalist intuitionists.

Despite being strongly intellectual, it is worth underscoring the fact that for Huemer, even the most formal appearances or intuitions are decidedly non-inferential in the sense I have discussed throughout. Even when an agent has a seeming or appearance state in which a basic principle such as the transitivity of x , y , and z given above seems to be true, this appearance is always provisional and could be defeated by later or more explicit rational examination. Just as the appearance of a stick being bent in water is easily overturned by removing the stick and seeing it to be straight, intuitions are always defeasible and subject to revision. We may say then, that an appearance is a non-doxastic state that occurs prior to beliefs formed by any reasoning process. Huemer is also keen to note that in many cases, our intuitions simply cannot be explained as inferential products of any prior beliefs. Thought experiments in which a person is asked to evaluate the morality of killing one person to save five others, for example, yield

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 383.

competing intuitions when the facts of the experiment are varied. In the case where killing one person involves actively intervening to cause their death, the common intuition is that such an action is immoral. In contrasting cases in which the death of a single person is not actively caused but merely allowed to happen, the intuition is, as often as not, that such a choice is moral when it results in saving five others. By invoking such cases, Huemer makes the point that intuitions cannot typically be explained as products of some reasoning process. We may hold the same belief that killing an innocent to save others is immoral but nonetheless have different intuitions about the cases above.

Not without some reason, the account of appearance intuitionism developed above may seem to depart in significant ways from the “moral perception” model that occupied the previous chapter. Huemer’s descriptions of intuitions as “intellectual appearances” for instance, may fail to capture the strongly affective or emotional dimensions of an agent’s moral experience. As I have indicated in the exploration of the Phenomenological Claim (PC), one of the chief virtues of MP is that it seems to account for the richly textured, and often keenly felt, qualities of our moral lives. Preston Werner, Robert Audi, Sabine Roeser, Margaret Olivia Little, and others have done much to insert issues of affective or emotional responsiveness into discussions of moral psychology and evaluation. It is difficult to see how Huemer’s depictions of intuitions as narrow intellectual or propositional states does justice to this range of felt moral responses. It may be plausible to think that by casting intuitions as intellectual appearances, Huemer’s appearance intuitionism is capable of handling only a fraction of the moral cases for which MP may provide ready or more satisfying explanation.

Despite the initial disparities between MP and appearance intuitionism and any concerns with Huemer’s particular statement of the view, I argue that MP can be defended as a form of

appearance intuitionism. I will make clear below that construing moral perceptions as something comparable to Huemer's "seemings" or "appearances" goes a long way to clarifying how moral perceptions can be likened to sensory perception. While intuitionism differs noticeably from the kinds of representational theories of perception into which many MP advocates look to situate their work, I argue that appearance intuitionism in particular even allows us to make use of the language of "seeing" moral wrongness in some interesting if not entirely literal sense. In the following section, I develop some relevant points of overlap between sensory perceptions and ethical intuition and suggest that this analogy demonstrates why appearance intuitionism and moral perception may have substantial commonalities. I then turn a positive presentation of a novel version of appearance intuition that I submit is effectively interchangeable with MP.

2.3 Extending Appearance Intuitionism

We are now in a position to turn squarely to the principal argument of this chapter, and I develop this argument in several intermediate moves below. First, I present an analogy that Michael Huemer has helpfully drawn between intuitions and perceptions which points to their functional similarities as epistemological modes of knowing the external world. I appropriate this analogy to argue that in view of the similarities between intuition and perception that there is at least something plausible to the idea that moral perceptions might fairly be compared to moral intuitions. I also argue that appearance intuitionism is a promising form of intuitionism that may allow us to capture even some of the perceptual language of seeing common in the MP literature. In later sections, I demonstrate that a revised conception of appearance than those currently on offer could be developed that is still more consonant with MP. To date, intuitionists have tended to oppose intellectual and affective appearances in ways that may fail to capture the many experiential characteristics of moral perceptions examined in the previous chapter. What I shall

be calling Perceptual Intuitionism represents a more ecumenical or expansive understanding of appearances that rectifies these limitations and is quite close to MP. The proposed extension of appearance intuitionism and the claim that such a move might allow a revision or rebranding of MP is either a very ambitious claim or a very modest one. I tend to think it is the latter. My principal aim is merely to show that it is possible to develop some notion of an appearance that is roughly interchangeable with a moral perception, and that many moral perceptionists may already be appearance intuitionists in all but name.

2.3.1 Analogizing Perceptions and Ethical Intuitions

This chapter began with the claim that moral perception and intuitionism intersect in important respects as models of non-inferential moral knowledge. It is my task now to demonstrate more precisely why moral perceptions and intuitions ought to be considered jointly as comparable modes of moral knowledge and why, by extension, MP might be subsumed into some version of intuitionism.¹¹¹ I argue that what permits this close comparison is that perception and intuition function analogously as epistemologies directed at the external world. To draw this analogy convincingly, I lean again on Michael Huemer's work. Huemer has argued that perceptions and intuitions are analogous epistemic states since each assumes a realist theory of mind-independent properties. In what follows, I recount Huemer's "direct realism" and develop sympathetically some relevant points of analogy between sensory perception and ethical

¹¹¹ Readers should be sensitive here not only to what I claim above but also to what I do not claim. I do not, for instance, argue that moral perceptions in every case may be reductively considered as intuitions or that it is not possible to conceive of a form of moral perception that is not continuous with intuitionism. I claim rather that the two are "functionally" similar i.e. that intuitions and perceptions are epistemological modes or ways of knowing that behave similarly.

intuition that surround it.¹¹² This analogy between perception and intuition offers what I think are good reasons to suppose that moral perceptions can be treated fairly as ethical intuitions.

The analogy between sensory perception and ethical intuitions that Huemer advances cannot be understood apart from his views on perception vis-à-vis direct realism. Huemer's principal motivation for advancing direct realism is to combat various forms of external world skepticism that deny the objectivity and mind-independence of a range of properties such as sensory qualities or moral values for instance. To bring direct realism into sharper relief, we may parse it into two obvious commitments. In the first place, to be a realist with respect to some perceivable property is, at least in Huemer's understanding, to believe that this property is truly part of an objective world that exists irrespective of our beliefs and attitudes about it.¹¹³ The realist, then, is one who takes seriously the widely held, pre-theoretical confidence that when we perceive an object of mundane experience such as a chair that the chair exists whether we perceive it or not and that the properties it displays in perception are genuine properties of the chair itself. What Huemer identifies as direct realism adds the further presumption that when we perceive an external object, our awareness is actually of that object and not merely the object as it features in our own mental states.¹¹⁴ The twin commitments of direct realism distinguish it from various types of anti-realism that deny the independent reality of objects or properties of perception. Direct realism is also invariably at odds with any "indirect realism" which claims

¹¹² Robert Audi has also presented an analogy between sensory perception and moral intuitions that is in many respects similar to Huemer's. Like Huemer, Audi also invokes the concept of appearance states or what he calls "seemings" in describing this connection. See Audi, *Moral Perception*, 88-93.

¹¹³ There are, of course, putatively "real" properties that defy this simple characterization. Perceptions of pain sensations, for instance, are arguably mind-dependent in the sense that they require a perceiving subject. It makes little sense to speak of free floating "pain" that is part of the fabric of objective reality that is not also pain experience by someone. Despite this mind-dependence, pain seems no less "real." While I acknowledge the difficulties posed by such examples to the kind of objectivity described above, I can only bracket them and leave them aside since I am interacting chiefly with Huemer's understanding of realism.

¹¹⁴ Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 3.

that though the world is filled with real objects, our perceptions yield awareness only of representations or mental images of these objects and not the objects themselves.

According to Huemer, this sort of realism is plausible not only in the realm of sensory experience but also in the moral domain. Huemer is an avowed moral realist, and he shares the basic belief that moral properties too are features of mind-independent reality. He notes that moral evaluations such as “Torturing puppies is wrong,” for example, seem to be true in virtue of the fact that torturing puppies really *is* wrong and that this moral fact obtains regardless of historical situation, culture, or subjective belief.¹¹⁵ Just as it is common to suppose that our visual perceptions of dogs and trees put us into contact with the real features of these objects, moral realism treats moral language as fundamentally geared to stating genuine facts about moral reality. As readers will recall from the introduction to this thesis, a principal motivation for MP is similarly to lend credibility to moral realism. Much like moral perception epistemologies, then, Huemer’s own ethical intuitionism treats moral realism as presumptively true and holds that moral beliefs and judgments point to objective ethical facts.

If we are willing to follow Huemer’s realist presumptions, then, he argues, there are compelling similarities between sensory perception and ethical intuition. His principal observation is that perception and intuition function similarly as modes of “awareness” of mind-independent reality.¹¹⁶ Perception is the mechanism through which we gain awareness of physical facts, and ethical intuition puts us in touch with ethical or moral facts. Huemer’s statement of this analogy is clear and cannot easily be improved upon, so I offer one trenchant statement of it here in full:

¹¹⁵ Huemer, “Revisionary Intuitionism,” 370.

¹¹⁶ Huemer’s full treatment of “awareness” is complex and layered, involving consideration of intentionality, success conditions, etc. For a thorough definition of awareness, see Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 51-55.

The relationship between our intuitions and the moral facts is, in some important respects, analogous to the relationship between our observations and the physical facts about our environment: physical facts exist independently of our observations, but observations are our way of knowing about the physical facts; the function of observation, which it usually fulfills, is to correspond to the physical facts. Similarly, moral facts exist independently of our intuitions, but intuitions are our way of knowing about the moral facts; the function of ethical intuitions is to correspond to the moral facts...The point I have made is simply that moral realism fits together with an intuitionist moral epistemology just as realism about external objects fits together with a broadly empiricist epistemology of the external world.¹¹⁷

This passage clearly evinces what I have claimed is Huemer's realism with respect to both sensory and moral properties. More importantly it provides ample reason to think that sensory perception and ethical intuition are epistemically comparable as well. In Huemer's understanding, both sensory perception and ethical intuition function similarly within the context of a realist theory of mind-independent properties or facts. Sensory perception is our chief path to knowing anything about physical facts, and ethical intuition is the primary epistemological path to gaining any knowledge about the ethical or moral properties that are no less "real" than the color or shape of objects. In my view, Huemer's analogy is an insightful one, and it buttresses the central argument of this chapter. That argument, again, is that what has been called moral perception may be collapsed into some version of moral intuitionism. MP advocates intend moral perception as an explanation of how agents form moral beliefs and evaluations in response to the world around them. Huemer's analogy suggests that in the moral case, it is ethical intuitions which are the primary epistemological mode of accessing moral properties or facts. One plausible implication of this view, I submit, is that what have been cast as moral perceptions for the purposes of MP are effectively intuitions.

To illustrate the promise of this analogy and how it might help elide MP and moral intuitionism in the way I am suggesting, we may also consider the experiential similarities between sensory perception and intuition that Huemer highlights. One notable feature of both perception and intuition is that each seems to be "transparent" in experience and to recede from

¹¹⁷ Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 371-372.

conscious awareness. In the case of sensory perception, direct realism holds that our awareness is chiefly of the objects of perception in a relatively straightforward and unproblematic way. While perceptions may involve mental or representational states such as mental images, the object of perception for the direct realist is always some external item or property and not the intervening mental content. Huemer explains “when we try to look at our experiences, we just ‘see through’ them to the objects they represent.”¹¹⁸ If asked to describe a perception of a red apple, for example, I find it quite easy to describe what seem to be properties of the apple without considering them more narrowly as contents of a perception that I undergo. Huemer goes on to explain that the intuitionist is effectively a “direct realist about ethics,” and our intuitions consequently have some of these same experiential qualities.¹¹⁹ When an agent has an intuition that “deceiving children is wrong,” this intuition does not seem to be the object of her awareness but instead something that she “‘sees through’ to the moral reality” behind the proposition.¹²⁰ From this perspective, both sensory perception and ethical intuitions seem to be unobtrusive features of experience. Each not only shares the function of making agent’s aware of external properties, both are experientially similar as transparent mental states.

A distinct though related point of overlap between sensory perception and ethical intuition is that each yields an awareness of external properties non-inferentially. Much has been said of non-inferentiality in preceding pages, and Huemer’s analogy gives some additional clarity to the claim that perceptual beliefs—including potential moral perceptions—are non-inferential. Sensory perceptions are arguably non-inferential in the sense that we do not need to reason our way to the belief that we sense an object in perception. Huemer explains that our

¹¹⁸ Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 121.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

“perceptual beliefs” seem to be justified or supported by the “perceptual experience” itself.¹²¹

When I form the belief that a sunset has a reddish hue, for example, I seem to require no further justification for this belief than the experience of perceiving the sunset as red. Moreover, I do not undergo the visual experience and then reason to the belief that evening sky has this particular color. Rather my visual experience and the corresponding belief seem to be equally self-attesting; one does not function as a premise for the other. Ethical intuitions are similarly non-inferential, according to Huemer, because they require no justification. Huemer notes that moral intuitions do not “function as a kind of *evidence* from which we do or should infer moral conclusions.”¹²² Once an agent has the intuition that say “incest is immoral,” Huemer takes it that we are directly aware of the relevant moral facts, and the intuition itself “constitutes our awareness of moral facts.”¹²³ The analogy between sensory perception and ethical intuition which Huemer envisions may thus sharpen the notion that these mental states are non-inferential. The transparency of these mental states seems to provide one explanation of non-inferentiality.

I contend that much of the MP literature can be read as an attempt to explain the fact that our moral experiences seem to be transparent, immediate, and non-inferential in the sense Huemer describes. The thought experiment CAT deployed in the opening pages of this thesis is intended to motivate the idea that we can identify moral wrongdoing in some direct and immediate way. When Jim spots the hoodlums setting the cat on fire, his spontaneous sense that “what the hoodlums are doing is wrong” appears to emerge from nothing other than his witnessing this grisly sight. As we have seen, the moral perception literature looks to account for

¹²¹ Huemer’s argumentation on this point is, of course, more complex than what I have presented here. In fact, he develops his account of non-inferential, perceptual justification as a kind of “foundationalism” at great length. See *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, chapter V.

¹²² Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 121-122.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

this phenomenon by situating moral properties within a wider philosophy of sensory perception. By defending the “Representational Claim,” moral perceptionists argue that Jim can see wrongness in much the same way he can detect visual properties. I suggest, however, that Huemer’s analogy between perception and intuition points to another way to explain such instances of moral experience not as perceptions, narrowly construed, but as intuitions. Huemer’s analogy demonstrates that many of the features of sensory perception that have drawn interest among moral perceptions—particularly immediacy and non-inferentiality—also typify ethical intuitions. The functional and experiential similarities between perception and intuition identified by Huemer provide further reasons to think that what have been denominated as moral perceptions can be understood equally well as moral or ethical intuitions.

Appearance intuitionism may be an especially well suited variety of intuitionism for capturing the language and intent of MP. Readers will recall from the first presentation of this view in 2.2 above, that an appearance is a mental state in which some proposition seems or appears presumptively true apart from any attempt at justification by reason or evidence. In a looser sense, an appearance is also a mental state in which something appears in a certain respect in experience. Building upon this idea that appearances involve a certain form of presentation to a subject, Huemer argues that appearance intuitionism may make use of the language of seeing moral facts that pervades the MP literature. He observes “when one thinks about the proposition *p*, one often has the experience of seemingly ‘seeing’ it to be true.” In Huemer’s judgment, this “seeing is intellectual rather than perceptual” but it is no less a form of perception. Huemer’s distinction between seeing and seeing perceptually may initially seem paradoxical, but he looks to deny only that seeing moral facts involves apprehending them in a narrowly sensory way. We certainly do not literally see injustice as we would colors, Huemer seems to imply, but there may

be real sense in which we can see through our intuitions to the moral facts behind them.

Huemer's analysis may give some reason to think, then, that theorists can continue to make use of perceptual language even outside MP.

2.3.2 Existing Accounts of Appearances and Their Limitations

In order to argue that appearance intuitionism can be leveraged into something like MP, it will be critical to have an appropriate account of appearance or seeming states themselves. I urge that what is needed on this score is some notion of an appearance that is able to capture the diverse cases and experiences which the MP literature has treated as perceptions. Moral perceptions, we have seen, may involve anything from a primitive sense that a situation tokens wrongdoing to forms of non-doxastic emotional responses. The literature on appearance intuitionism is still in its infancy, but I argue that no existing account of appearances is capable of doing justice to this experiential range. Most of these accounts have been developed too narrowly and in ways that create unhelpful oppositions between different types of appearances. I treat first Michael Huemer's view of appearances and suggest that it is too cognitive or intellectual to capture the diverse moral phenomenology of MP. I then turn to one of the few alternative accounts of moral appearances on offer found in the work of Finish metaethicist Antti Kauppinen. I argue that Kauppinen errs perhaps in the other direction by tying appearances too closely to sentiment and emotional responses. My criticism of Huemer and Kauppinen is not that either is wrong in the particulars of their views. I am happy to concede here at the outset that Huemer's cognitive appearances and Kauppinen's affective appearances are plausible features of moral experience. I object rather to how each of their views excludes the other's, and to the implication that moral appearances must be either cognitive or affective. I will argue

below that a more expansive view of appearances may be developed that captures elements of both, and as a result that the diverse forms of moral perceptions may be recast as appearances.

I turn now to a critical assessment of Michael Huemer's understanding of appearances. Readers will recall from the survey of moral intuitionism carried out above that for Huemer ethical intuitions have the character of "initial, *intellectual* appearance[s]." ¹²⁴ When a moral agent has an intuition that say promise keeping is *prima facie* right for instance, this intuition is an appearance in the sense that it is a mental state in which a proposition such as "promise keeping is morally right" seems presumptively true without being grounded upon inference. Huemer's decision to defend moral appearances as proto-propositional or cognitive states has unique motivations, and it would be uncharitable to treat his view without acknowledging them. It is clear that Huemer thinks a whole range of less general and even less cognitive appearances or intuitions are quite possible. He indicates that personal circumstance, emotional predisposition, cultural conditioning, or a range of other explanatory factors may inform some of our moral appearances. Yet he shares the skepticism of some detractors of intuitionism who have argued forcefully that ethical intuitions which rely upon such personal, cultural, affective factors, etc. are less reliable and are therefore suspect as foundations of moral belief or judgment. Huemer draws upon the work of critics such as Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Sharon Street who have questioned the credibility of intuitions that might plausibly be explained as products of personal or biological biases. ¹²⁵ In response to such critiques, Huemer proposes a "revisionary

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Huemer cites in particular Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Moral Skepticisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 195-204 where Sinnott-Armstrong suggests that emotional biases may make intuitions less reliable. Huemer is also obviously indebted to Sharon Street's evolutionary critique of intuitions as thinly veiled biological biases. See Sharon Street, "A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006): 124.

intuitionism” which looks to systematically identify and remove such possible sources of bias and to flag some intuitions as less reliable than others.

The kind of intuitions that survive in Huemer’s “revisionary” theory are only those which cannot be explained as products of personal bias, emotion, or broader cultural factors. Huemer’s considered opinion is that only a small subset of highly cognitive appearances should be esteemed as most reliable. He defends “abstract” and “formal” intuitions as the most trustworthy. Abstract intuitions are those that involve the most general moral principles such as “the right action is always the action that has the best overall consequences.”¹²⁶ Formal intuitions are more general still in that they provide constraints for ethical theorizing without affirming or denying an explicitly ethical principle. A formal intuition such as “If x is better than y and y is better than z , then x is better than z ” bears no relation to ethics or morality but might be applied to cases of ethical reasoning. Huemer’s view of appearances, then, endorses a range of highly general and abstract intellectual or cognitive principles. Absent from Huemer’s catalog of reliable intuitions are appearances that might explain an agent’s moral view of a specific situation. By advancing formal and abstract appearances in place of these more particularized appearances, Huemer thinks that the intuitionist can avoid the charge that her intuitions have been corrupted by biases.

Huemer’s highly cognitive and formal view of appearances may be well motivated to respond to skepticism in certain quarters, but I suggest that it is implausible as a description of moral experience and one that cannot easily be reconciled with MP. The principal failings of Huemer’s view, in my judgment, are that it cannot provide an explanation of particular moral appearances and that it ignores all but entirely the role that affective responses seem to play in moral experience. In the first case, Huemer’s abstract and formal intuitions are mental states

¹²⁶ Ibid., 383.

which necessarily rule out consideration of concrete moral cases.¹²⁷ Huemer's suggestion that our most reliable ethical intuitions are mental states in which propositions such as "If *x* and *y* are qualitatively identical in non-evaluative respects, then *x* and *y* are morally indistinguishable" seem to be true is difficult to reconcile with the moral belief that Jim forms in CAT that what the hoodlums are doing is wrong. Part of the promise of MP—a promise which CAT aptly demonstrates—is that by looking and seeing we can know that a *particular* form of wrongdoing is immoral. Huemer's intellectual appearances arguably lack the resources to account for these kind of concrete, immediate, and specific moral beliefs. Just as tellingly, the view fails to treat seriously emotions as integral parts of moral beliefs and experiences. The preceding chapter went to great length to underscore the fact that for many MP advocates, moral beliefs often co-occur with, or perhaps are even caused by, strong emotional reactions to situations. In Huemer's view, these emotional responses are at best extraneous features of moral appearances or at worst positive sources of bias or error in moral belief formation. I join some authors in thinking that revulsion, disgust, or even admiration are vital parts of moral experience and that any responsible moral epistemology must take account of these affective factors. Margaret Olivia Little, for instance, has ably examined how a certain emotional sensitivity is necessary to even be predisposed to notice the moral salience of some situations.¹²⁸

Antti Kauppinen's version of appearance intuitionism is an earnest—though I will argue too earnest—attempt to come to terms with this affective and sentimental character of moral

¹²⁷ Huemer in fact concedes this point by noting that his revisionary intuitionism does not consider "concrete intuitions" or intuitions which address particular moral circumstances. See Huemer, "Revisionary Intuitionism," 383.

¹²⁸ Margaret Olivia Little, "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology," *Hypatia* 10, no. 3 (1995): 122-123.

beliefs.¹²⁹ Kauppinen is happy to concede that there may be intellectual appearances of the sort developed by Michael Huemer. His general presentation of “appearances” as non-doxastic seeming states even parallels Huemer’s own descriptions. He rehearses, for example, the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion that also appears in Huemer’s work in which two line segments *appear* or *seem* to be of different lengths despite actually being equal to motivate the concept of intuitions as initial impressions that may prove deceptive.¹³⁰ Following Huemer, Kauppinen observes that there are “spontaneous and compelling non-doxastic” mental states which we might identify as some form of initial, intellectual appearance.¹³¹ Kauppinen notes “the intellectual appearance view is plausible enough” to call such appearances “intuitions.”¹³² In at least this general sense Kauppinen seems ready to affirm parts of Huemer’s work.

In stark contrast to Huemer, however, Kauppinen argues that moral appearances or intuitions are fundamentally distinct from any general class of cognitive appearances. Kauppinen finds that moral appearances are unique for what he describes as both “phenomenological” and “functional” reasons.¹³³ Quite in keeping with what I have been calling the “Phenomenological Claim” (PC), he maintains that moral appearances have unique experiential features. In Kauppinen’s view, moral appearances are often characterized by

¹²⁹ Given the discussion underway on different views of “appearances,” I have chosen to class Kauppinen as an appearance intuitionist. Due to his focus on sentiment and emotional responses, however, his work might also be seen as a form of response intuitionism. Perhaps the most even handed way to understand his work is that lies at the periphery of both of these sub-types of intuitionism.

¹³⁰ For a picture of the Müller-Lyer experiment and Kauppinen’s explanation, see Anti-Kauppinen, “Intuition and Belief in Moral Motivation,” (Unpublished Draft, 2012), 3-4; for Huemer’s handling of the same example, see Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 99-100.

¹³¹ Kauppinen, “Intuition and Belief in Moral Motivation,” 4-5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*,

emotional or affective responsiveness.¹³⁴ To illustrate the point, Kauppinen imagines a likely moral response to the use of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. When an agent entertains or forms the moral belief that “using the atomic bomb on civilians was morally wrong,” the experience of attending to this proposition, Kauppinen argues, is much more than cognitive. He observes that by considering the horrific damage and human suffering wrought by the bomb, this proposition may be keenly felt or appreciated in ways much richer than merely assenting to its truth. In this instance, the affective response to the atomic bomb seems quite integral to the belief that employing the bomb was morally wrong. Emotional content, *pace* Huemer, is arguably central to moral appearances, and something important seems to be missed when moral beliefs or appearances are treated independently of these emotions.

Moral appearances not only involve this affective characteristic, they also display what Kauppinen suggests are key “functional” differences vis-à-vis other classes of appearances. He explains that moral appearances are intrinsically motivating and action guiding. The motivating force of our moral intuitions may even be great enough to override pre-existing moral beliefs. As a case in point, Kauppinen recalls the fictional case of Huckleberry Finn. In Twain’s novel, Huck Finn holds the considered moral belief that he should return his travelling companion, escaped slave Jim, to his master. Despite this stance, Huck Finn cannot bring himself to turn Jim in at the moment the choice is before him. Kauppinen interprets this case as an indication that some moral appearances or intuitions exert a particularly strong influence on action. When Huck faces his moral decision, the intuition that he should not turn Jim in overrides altogether his earlier moral deliberation. Kauppinen argues further that most moral appearances seem to have a certain direction of fit toward specific actions. The moral intuition that my decision to lie is

¹³⁴ Kauppinen has developed precisely this point in “A Humean Theory of Moral Intuition,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2013): 360-381.

immoral, for instance, may naturally cause me to hide or become evasive. What Kauppinen underscores by such examples is the fact that moral appearances or intuitions are directly action guiding while other forms of appearances may have only a mediate bearing on action.

According to Kauppinen, what best explains these distinctive features of moral appearances is that they are manifestations of “sentiment.” Kauppinen draws on the “sentimentalist” tradition reaching back to Adam Smith and David Hume to argue that “sentiments” constitute “dispositions to feel, act, and think in certain ways.”¹³⁵ Thinking of moral intuitions or appearances as expressions of sentiment, he argues, does much to explain the emotional qualities of our moral reactions and responses. Sentimental or emotional responses are often keenly felt and compelling in the way that our moral disgust at egregious wrongdoing seems naturally to be manifested in highly visceral or emotional ways. More importantly, sentiments help explain the formation of moral beliefs which build upon non-doxastic moral appearances. Kauppinen observes that a moral sentiment is directed at an object and represents its object as having specified characteristics. When an agent feels anger at seeing the elderly taken advantage of by confidence schemes, it is plausible to think that this anger is not free floating but is instead a response directed at certain feature of the situation viz. that deliberate deception for personal gain is *wrong*. If moral appearances and sentiments are object directed in this way and represent disposition to think or act, then it becomes relatively easy to see how these appearances may give way naturally to considered moral beliefs and actions. In Kauppinen’s estimation, such connections between sentiment or emotion and moral appearances is non-contingent, so that a moral appearance always relies in some form on an underlying sentiment. He notes baldly, “for something to *seem* wrong is for it to *feel* wrong.” It should be plain that Kauppinen’s view is radically opposed to Huemer’s. Huemer had all but dismissed

¹³⁵ Kauppinen, “Intuition and Belief in Moral Motivation,” 8.

emotions as sources of moral belief or experience and Kauppinen makes sentiment absolutely central to moral intuition and belief.

Though Kauppinen's approach is admirably sensitive to the role that sentiment may play in moral experience, I find it no less problematic than Huemer's. It is one thing to find a place for emotion in moral intuitions or appearances, but it is quite another to reductively explain all moral intuitions as expressions of sentiment. Despite Kauppinen's insistence, I think it is relatively easy to uncover moral appearances that do not seem to involve a sentimental structure or emotional response. To illustrate this point, we may consider the class of ethical thought experiments represented by so called "trolley car problems." Though variations abound, the basic setup of these problems involves a choice of whether or not divert a trolley bound to kill some number of people on a track so that it will kill a single individual elsewhere on the track.¹³⁶ Regardless of an agent's response, it seems doubtful that this choice must be informed by an emotional or sentimental response. When Ralph decides to that he would divert the trolley to kill one person rather than several, his decision may rest on an initial appearance that has no obvious affective dimension. Perhaps his intuition rests on the initial appearance that it simply seems better to preserve life in the greatest measure possible. Such an appearance, of course, may involve an affective response, but I suggest that it might just as easily be affect-neutral or seen as plausible for prudential reasons. It is an open question, in such cases whether Kauppinen's sentimentalist explanation is either needed or helpful.

2.3.3 Perceptual Intuitionism

We are now in a position to reap the fruits of what has been sown in the previous sections and to make good on the claim that MP can be recast as an appropriately developed form of

¹³⁶ These problems often appear in studies of normative ethical theories since they push agents to articulate a rationale for their choice in the given case.

intuitionism. I devote this section to this final agenda. I will begin by advancing what I argue is a more ecumenical understanding of moral appearances that avoids the oppositions between cognitive and affective appearances which marked Huemer and Kauppinen's works. My principal intervention into the literature on moral appearances will be to argue that the most distinctive feature of target moral beliefs is that they have a presentational or evaluative aspect that neither depends on justifying inferences nor endorses a more particular phenomenology. In my view, a moral appearance is chiefly a mental state that presents some situation or pattern of facts *as* presumptively moral or immoral. The precise mode of presentation, I submit, may vary without sacrificing this key functional mark of an appearance. This more general or functional view of appearances is able to make sense of both cognitive and affective moral experiences. With this revised notion of appearances in hand, I return once more—and I think in a position to make the most convincing case—to the argument of this chapter that MP can be reimagined and articulated as a form of intuitionism. Under the heading of what I will be calling “Perceptual Intuitionism,” I demonstrate that the functional similarities between MP and appearance intuitionism are undeniable. In view of these similarities, I make the provisional case that what have been treated as moral perceptions can be described quite accurately as appearance intuitions.

I begin by attempting to hone in on a revised conception of moral appearances that will bridge the gap between the various interpretations limned in the previous section. As I will employ the term, a moral appearance may be defined as follows:

Moral Appearance: A spontaneous and presumptively credible mental state that presents a situation as having a specified moral quality or character.

Much of this definition is likely be predictable given the treatment of appearances in Huemer and Kauppinen. To suggest that a moral appearance is “spontaneous” is only to say that an agent's sense that theft is immoral, for instance, appears in experience often directly, immediately and

non-inferentially i.e. in keeping with the features of EC examined in section 1.4 above. A moral appearance is “presumptively credible” in the sense that all things being equal it is natural to presume, at least initially, that things are the way they appear to be.¹³⁷ The moral appearance that theft is immoral, then, has at least some positive epistemic status and seems to confer at least an initial justification to any corresponding belief. Finally, to be a moral appearance at all, a seeming state must “present” a situation or event as having specific “moral” qualities. For obvious reasons, optical illusions such as the Müller-Lyer experiment may be appearances in a broad sense, but they are not moral appearances unless they present something as moral, immoral, virtuous, vicious, etc. My definition of moral appearances bears resemblance to Huemer and Kauppinen’s, but it differs in one respect. It emphasizes the function of a moral appearance as a kind of presentation over any more particular view of the experiential character of that presentation. It is, therefore, a more minimal statement of what roles appearances play in moral experiences and one that may embrace either a cognitive or affective phenomenology.

While I do not wish to take the matter for granted, I think it should be plain that the definition of moral appearance given above is quite compatible with the cognitive or intellectual phenomenology Huemer defends. As a case in point, consider, an ethical intuition offered by Huemer: “It is unjust to punish someone for a crime he did not commit.”¹³⁸ Let us recall that for Huemer this ethical intuition must be a mental state independent of “argument” or inference in which the ethical proposition appears or “seems” true. He notes that an intuition is therefore “evaluative” in some important sense.¹³⁹ These then are the key functional descriptions of a moral appearance or intuition for Huemer, and these descriptions are quite in keeping with moral

¹³⁷ This is, again, Michael Huemer’s principle of “Phenomenal Conservatism.”

¹³⁸ Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 102.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

appearances as I have defined them. What Huemer has described as seemingly true evaluations, I have described similarly as presumptively credible presentations. Huemer adds, of course, that the chief experiential feature of this intuition is that it rests on a kind of rational apprehension, but I suggest that this more particular phenomenological claim merely clarifies the mode of presentation but adds little differences to how moral appearances function in their role of making agents aware of real moral properties in the external world. So, I think it is safe to suggest that my revised conception of moral appearances can capture the thrust of Huemer's view as well.

Making the case that my definition can also handle the kind of affective or emotional appearances that preoccupy Kauppinen is, admittedly, a less straightforward affair. Even the argumentation of theorists favorable to such appearances often provides little sense of how emotions themselves function as evaluations or presentations in the sense assumed above. Kauppinen, to point to merely the most prominent example, observes briskly "it should be relatively uncontroversial that emotions constitute *appearances*."¹⁴⁰ I share Kauppinen's interest in defending the possibility of appearance states tied to felt responses, but I think it is far from incandescently obvious that emotion and affect can satisfy the definition of moral appearances above. To bolster Kauppinen's claim that emotions do constitute appearances, it will be necessary to ground the claim argumentatively in an appropriate theory of emotions. Such a theory of emotions has been developed more self-consciously in the work of some notable supporters of MP or intuitionism—notably Robert Audi and Sabine Roeser.

According to these theorists, emotions can be treated as appearances since they are intentional states that involve directedness toward an object. A common view of emotions as raw "feels" experienced by agents still persists, yet these authors emphasize that emotions and affective responses also invariably have an implicitly evaluative structure. Robert Audi, for

¹⁴⁰ Kauppinen, "Intuition and Belief in Moral Motivation," 9.

instance, treats emotions as principally a kind of response to a pattern of facts, and as a result the experience of an emotion suggests some moral evaluation of this fact pattern. Audi explains that an instructor's anger at a student's cheating seems to be imply some cognitive or evaluative content of the emotion beyond mere feels.¹⁴¹ The instructor's anger is a kind of response to the implicit evaluation or determination that cheating is wrong. Sabine Roeser's development of affectual intuitionism, envisions a similarly complex and evidential or evaluative role for emotions. Roeser, too, thinks that the proper view of emotions must avoid pure sentimentalism. She argues instead that moral emotions are "at the same time both value judgments and affective states."¹⁴² For this reason, emotions must be a kind of intentional state that directs a form of judgment toward an event. I will not multiply examples of this basic point, but I remind readers that Kauppinen too finds that emotions have both an evaluative and felt dimension.¹⁴³

In view of these recent examinations of the intentional and evaluative structure of emotions, I feel confident in saying that emotions can constitute moral appearances as I have defined them. Emotions are typically quite spontaneous, as they emerge in experience directly as a felt response to a given situation. Cases in which a person infers their own emotions, I submit, are comparatively rare. Furthermore, the analysis of Audi, Roeser, and Kauppinen all lend some credibility to the claim that moral appearances involve a kind of presentation of a situation as having a particular moral quality. Even the brief discussion above should make it clear that for these authors, emotions are evaluative and they have an intentional structure which makes some implicit claim about the moral qualities of the events to which they are directed. Finally,

¹⁴¹ Audi, *Moral Perception*, 136.

¹⁴² Roeser, 149.

¹⁴³ See my discussion of Kauppinen and his Humean "sentimentalism" above in 2.3.2. For Kauppinen's own elaboration of this point, see "A Humean Theory of Moral Intuition," 360-381.

affective appearances, like all appearances, are presumptively credible. When an agent experiences anger in the face of a lie, she likely has at least some reason to think that her anger is justified and that the lie is in fact immoral. In other words, emotions, like cognitive appearances, have some initially positive epistemic status. At this point, I think readers should acknowledge that it is at least plausible that some emotions—perhaps not all—play the evaluative role of a moral appearance. Having treated both cognitive and affective appearances, I also think it is safe to say that my revised definition of appearances makes good on the promise of ecumenism.

Perhaps unbeknownst to readers, all the raw materials are now in place to construct the final bridge between MP and appearance intuitionism. The definition of moral appearances advanced above has arguably done most of this bridging task already. That definition, once more, has emphasized that one defensible view of moral appearances or intuitions is that they are spontaneous or non-inferential mental states that present, in an initially credible manner, a situation as moral, immoral, or some other ethical property. I submit that this definition is functionally interchangeable with the notion of moral perceptions discussed in chapter 1. As we have seen, moral perceptions are mental states typically characterized by the representation of a circumstance *as* an instance or example of some moral property. Moral perceptions are also crucially spontaneous or non-inferential in the sense that they intrude on experience without being products of explicit or implicit reasoning. Finally, moral perceptions may invoke a range of different experiential or phenomenological modes. A moral perception may be largely cognitive in nature or it may embrace more affective and emotional characteristics. There may be slight variations in emphasis or expression in these descriptions of moral perceptions and moral appearances, but if there is a deeper difference in how each purports to explain moral beliefs, I do not find it at all obvious or forthcoming.

As a consequence of these profound structural similarities, there is no clear barrier to articulating the moral perception view as a particular type of intuitionism centered on the kind of appearances I have defended. I offer Perceptual Intuitionism as a provisional statement of what such a view might look like:

Perceptual Intuitionism (PI): Ethical agents may have some non-inferentially credible moral beliefs by having moral appearances of relevant properties.¹⁴⁴

In my view, Perceptual Intuitionism is equally faithful to the shape and motivations of the MP literature and to the major tenets of moral intuitionism. I have already glossed the different parts of this definition in various ways above, and I will not rehearse definitions of non-inferentiality, appearances, or credibility already well known to readers. I should note, however, that this definition relies principally on the functional similarities between moral perceptions and appearance intuitions i.e. how each explains the process of moral belief formation. In order for Perceptual Intuitionism to prevail as a plausible synthesis of MP and intuitionism, it need not be shown that moral perceptions and moral intuitions are analogous in *every* respect or that there is not a whit of difference between them. Instead, Perceptual Intuitionism becomes or remains plausible in the measure that it can explain how ethical intuitions seem to have all the perceptual characteristics or behaviors—transparency, immediacy, etc.—which have inspired proponents of MP. I submit that Perceptual Intuitionism does exactly that, and it therefore brings a natural conclusion to the extended analogy between ethical intuitions and sensory perceptions that I have labored and refined throughout this chapter.

2.4 An Objection Considered

While it may be hoped that readers will have joined me in thinking that MP can be developed along different lines as a form of intuitionism, I conclude by treating what may

¹⁴⁴ Readers will notice some similarity between the definition of Perceptual Intuitionism given here and a rival definition of the same term by Cowan. See Cowan, 3.

emerge as one of the chief objections to this claim. There certainly is not space—or likely patience—enough to offer a proleptic defense of every argument I have made above.

Accordingly, I treat what I think may be the principal objection of moral perceptionists eager to defend their view against the charge that MP can be collapsed into a form of intuitionism. That objection can be imagined and stated as follows:

Objection:

This chapter has gone to great length to demonstrate that, like MP, moral intuitionism may emphasize particular phenomenological features of moral experience and the non-inferentiality of moral beliefs. Such comparisons may be well-founded, but what of the “Representational Claim” that you have argued is also central to MP? Can intuitionism account for “representational” content of perceptions as MP sets out to do? Does the idea of “perceptions” and “intuitions” as both endorsing a form of direct realism undercut any claim that intuitionism might make sense of “representations?”

Reply:

I am happy to concede that this objection begins with a true observation. I have spent greater time analogizing the epistemological and phenomenological aspects of perceptions and intuitions, but this should not be taken as an indication that I have necessarily abandoned altogether the “Representational Claim.” For reasons I explained at the outset of Chapter 2, non-inferentiality is the distinguishing mark of MP, and for that reason, I think it is only proper that more of the analysis of intuitionism and perception take up this issue. Despite some momentary embarrassment created by this uneven emphasis, however, I do not think the kind of perceptual intuitionism I have defended is in any way at odds with RC or should be troubled by that claim.

In the first place, I have suggested the principal feature of moral “appearances” is that they present moral propositions such as “child abuse is morally wrong” as presumptively credible or true independent of rational justification. I submit that this presentational character of appearances captures nearly everything that an MP advocate might insist upon as the “representational” character of a perception. The discussion of representational theories of

perception in 1.2 above indicated that representational theories similarly involve a property being represented or considered under a certain aspect. The distinction between mere seeing and seeing *as* for instance, turns on the ability of some event to appear or be represented to an agent *as* an instance or token of some property—say moral wrongness. Since both the representational theories of perception which influence MP authors and the “appearance” qualities of some intuitions both involve the presentation of some content to an agent, I think they would likely play the same role in any hybrid theory such as Perceptual Intuitionism.

I turn now to a second, and I think initially, more potent iteration of the critique that Perceptual Intuitionism may be incompatible with RC. It may be argued, as it was intimated above, that by analogizing “perceptions” and “intuitions” in the context of some version of “direct realism,” the resulting view of moral intuition leaves no space for representational content. Indeed, how can a theory like “direct” realism which claims that mental states like intuitions grant immediate access to their objects relate in any obvious way to a representational theory which treats our awareness of external properties as being mediated by some mental state or representation? This is an important question, and bungling the answer may leave readers with the impression that there is something important in MP that cannot be readily explained from inside the intuitionist tent.

I argue that this version of the objection, too, falls somewhat flat once the proper distinctions have been made. Michael Huemer, the source for my characterizations of “direct realism,” has helpfully treated this objection, and I think his answers are dispositive. Huemer explains that “direct realism” is not at odds with notion that perceptions involve “representations” given a certain understanding of the function of representations. In Huemer’s view, representations are principally “vehicles” or modes of awareness. When we have a perceptual

representation of say a picnic table, Huemer argues that our awareness is of the table itself. The mental state or representation of that table is the vehicle of awareness i.e. the thing by which we are made aware of the table.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, the representationalist is more apt to argue that the representation is our only object of awareness.¹⁴⁶ Huemer's distinction between representations as vehicles of awareness vs. objects of awareness creates a conceptual space for the direct realist to be a representationalist in some meaningful sense of the term. In similar fashion, it seems quite possible that the version of intuitionism I have developed can claim to be a form of direct awareness of moral properties and still make use of the language of representation.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, 121.

¹⁴⁶ Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, 79.

CONCLUSIONS: MP AND PROSPECTS FOR ITS FUTURE

The chapters above have covered considerable ground to interpret MP and to rework it as a form of intuitionism. I feel obliged to survey the argumentative territory I have traversed. In Chapter 1, I took up basic issues regarding the definition of what has been described as moral perception and tried to pin down some of its key assumptions. I advanced what I argue is composite definition of moral perception which tries to state what is common to various descriptions of the view—“At least some credible moral beliefs proceed non-inferentially from perceptual experiences whose contents include moral properties.” I argued further that in order to get off the ground, MP must rely on subsidiary claims. The perceptionist contends that moral properties can be represented in perception (RC), that moral properties produce distinctive experiences (PC), and that moral perceptions must be immediate and non-inferential (EC). Chapter 2 presumed this more explicit understanding of MP and its theoretical commitments and argued that MP could be refashioned as the alternate epistemology of moral intuitionism. That chapter carefully developed an analogy between perceptions and intuitions that emphasized their functional similarities. On the basis of this analogy, I concluded that since intuitions and perceptions have similar structures and function comparably in epistemology, MP might be recast as a version of appearance intuitionism. What, then, are we to make of MP in light of this comparison, and is the future of MP brighter or dimmer as a result?

One likely consequence of the connection between MP and moral intuitionism that I have drawn is that some MP authors may be forced to temper their optimism that the view is a significant departure from existing epistemologies. At the outset of this thesis, I noted that some scholars have seen MP as a novel, empirical account of moral belief formation. Justin McBrayer,

to single out one example, has observed that MP is quite distinct from more traditional “rationalistic” approaches.¹⁴⁷ By rationalist approaches to moral knowledge, McBrayer intends a range of established theories which may see moral beliefs as innate, self-evident, or, quite tellingly, as given “via intuition.”¹⁴⁸ Andrew Cullison argues similarly that what he calls “moral empiricism”—MP in all but name—is an upstart view in moral epistemology which may threaten more common alternatives.¹⁴⁹ I acknowledge that the literature on moral perception is a relatively recent player in the field, but I resist the further implication that MP is unique because of this novelty. If the analysis I have offered in Chapter 2 has been at all convincing, then it is safe to say that readers simply cannot endorse the excesses of some of these claims. MP may emphasize a broadly empirical process of ethical observation, but is far from clear that this emphasis puts it at odds with intuitionism. There are more reasons than not to see MP as continuous with previous epistemologies, and moral perceptionists should own these connections.

A more consequential worry raised by the analogy between MP and intuitionism is that key features of MP may be developed outside any explicitly perceptual account of moral properties. MP authors have noted, quite responsibly I think, that the claim that moral properties can be seen is not a suggestion that one literally sees injustice when it radiates the retina. Indeed, MP authors carefully distinguish literal sense perception from perceptual experiences involving complex representations.¹⁵⁰ Despite these distinctions, perceptionists insist that their

¹⁴⁷ McBrayer, “A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,” 305.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Cullison, 159.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, McBrayer’s distinction between “perception *simpliciter*” (sense perception) and “perception-*as*” (representational perception) in “Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,” *Ratio* 23, no. 3 (2010): 293. This is the same distinction which McBrayer draws elsewhere in terms of “perception *de re*” (literal sense perception of an object or event) and “perception *de dicto*” (perception *as*). See McBrayer, “A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,” 307. Finally, Robert Audi draws effectively the same distinction between the

representational accounts are functionally quite similar to sense perception. Moral perceptions are putatively similar to seeing a patch of color because they involve a direct, immediate, and unreasoned grasp of the situation. These characteristics explain much of the appeal of CAT. Moral perceptionists agree heartily with Harman’s scenario: “If you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that is wrong.”¹⁵¹ In Chapter 1, I explained how MP explains these structural features of experience by tying them to a representational theory of perception. The argument I have sketched in Chapter 2 points instead to ways that moral intuitionism may explain the same functional characteristics without resorting to a theory of perception. If intuitionism covers the same ground, we may wonder if it is necessary to retain the “perceptual” conceit of MP in the same measure or at all.

Antti Kauppinen has in fact explored how cases of immediate moral awareness might be best captured not by a genuinely perceptual theory but by what he terms a “quasi-perceptual” view.¹⁵² In Kauppinen’s understanding, the key structural characteristics of perceptions are plain. A visual perception, he observes, is “*non-doxastic*,” “*spontaneous*,” and “*primitively compelling*” in the sense that it seems to offer good reasons to suppose that things are the way they appear to be.¹⁵³ Kauppinen argues similarly that moral intuitions or appearances have precisely the same characteristics. Just as Jim’s experience in CAT seemed to involve a kind of direct insight into the moral fact of the matter, moral appearances are spontaneous and compelling in the same

literally “perceptual” i.e. those properties that are perceived by the human sensorium and the broadly “perceptible” i.e. those properties which might figure in representational mental states. See Audi, *Moral Perception*, 33-38.

¹⁵¹ Harman, 4 (emphasis in original). This passage is quoted verbatim in McBrayer, “Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,” 293.

¹⁵² See Kauppinen, “A Humean Theory of Moral Intuition,” 362.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 362-363.

sense Kauppinen attaches to perceptions. Despite these functional similarities between perceptions and moral appearances, Kauppinen urges that moral appearances support only a “quasi-perceptual” form of intuitionism. Kauppinen finds no need in other words to explain the force and immediacy of moral intuitions by showing that they *are* perceptions of one sort or another. He finds the analogy between perception and intuition to be useful but resists the further move of recasting intuitions *as* literally forms of perception. My analysis of Perceptual Intuitionism above makes a similar point, and I think it is an open question whether moral perceptionists should insist that they are doing true work in the philosophy of perception or whether they can be content merely to analogize moral beliefs with perceptions in useful ways.

The fact that MP is shown to be less unique or even perhaps less genuinely a perceptual theory by its association with intuitionism should not be taken as a reproach. I have not argued above—nor do I wish to begin here—that there is nothing valuable or important in the view. On the contrary, I tend to think that subsuming MP into some version of intuitionism helps rather than hurts MP and may open up ways to further some of its principal motivations and findings. I have confided at several points above that I think the primary motivation of MP is to explain how our moral experiences tend to be like Jim’s in CAT. How is it that one’s belief that lying is immoral seems to be so direct, spontaneous, compelling, and non-inferential? If this assessment of the motives for MP is correct, then the moral perceptionist might do well to make common cause with intuitionists who have a substantially similar account of moral belief. If the perceptionist hopes to explain, for example, how moral beliefs seem self-attesting or justified on their face, intuitionist explanations of this phenomenon abound. Similarly, for the perceptionist looking to sharpen her portrayal of how moral evaluations seem to spring into awareness without intervening judgments or inferences, intuitionist accounts of non-inferentiality can offer much

needed resources. Even if proponents of MP ultimately resist my conclusion that MP effectively is intuitionism, I think it is safe to say moral intuitionism offers a rich tradition of theorizing on a host of issues directly relevant to moral perception. MP authors should consciously make use of these resources. I leave this task to others, but I think intuitionists and perceptionists alike should be optimistic that they may have a bright future as allies and conversation partners.

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